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STUDY COURSES

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THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

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# THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

THEIR ORIGIN AND RELIGIOUS  
VALUES FOR TODAY

BY

GEORGIA LOUISE CHAMBERLIN

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THEIR ORIGIN AND RELIGIOUS  
VALUES FOR TODAY



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# THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

THEIR ORIGIN AND RELIGIOUS  
VALUES FOR TODAY

BY  
GEORGIA LOUISE CHAMBERLIN

AN OUTLINE BIBLE-STUDY COURSE OF  
THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE  
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## FOREWORD TO THE STUDENTS

This course belongs to the outline study series of the AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE for the work of which certificate credit is given to all who desire it. In order to secure this credit it is necessary to send in answers to all the questions at the end of each study. These answers should be accompanied by a fee of 50 cents for the certificate. Such certificates are not accepted for college credit but are recognized by many less formal educational organizations.

Although many students of this course will at first thought feel that they do not wish to work for a certificate, it is hoped that the majority of these will reverse their decisions when they stop to consider how much more fully the results of their work will be their own, when they have re-expressed them in this form. Since the course represents about one hundred hours of work the certificate is of real significance and value. Reports are not graded but the certificate is awarded to all who make an honest effort to answer the questions, many of which are formulated in such a way as to call not for simple statements of facts, but for the results of individual thought.







## STUDY I

# EARLY FRAGMENTS AND ANCIENT HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

### INTRODUCTORY

[For suggestions to leaders of classes see pp. 120-127]

The Christian religion is named for its great progenitor, Jesus Christ. From Him it has passed down to us through a long chain of followers, who have projected into it their own thinking and their own experiences and today we have a Christian religion which is a composite of the principles of Jesus and centuries of experience in the attempt to represent this religion in creeds, in conduct, and in organized bodies.

But back of all this lies the Old Testament. The Jews of Jesus' day were Bibliolators, that is, worshipers of the Old Testament, but the emphasis of their regard for the Old Testament was upon its legal element. In their passion for the legal holiness which they believed would in time bring God to earth to fulfil their centuries of expectation of world-influence and world-dominance, they had forced themselves to the strictest obedience to the religious laws found in the Old Testament. Indeed, these laws had been interpreted in relation to the most unimportant acts of life, and these interpretations had in turn become laws; so that in the days of Jesus a strict Jew slept, waked, ate, walked, prayed, gave his alms, and carried out every function of life in accordance with some stated law.

Jesus, also, was a student of the Old Testament. He knew it better than any man of his day, but he saw it in true proportion. To him its heroes were as living men. In them he saw the Spirit of God leading his people. The prophets,

denouncing the sins of his ancestors and pointing to an ever more spiritual conception of God, were a greater inspiration than the legalistic priests and scribes. The wise men who had treasured their own experience and that of their day and passed it on to the Hebrew people in the form of wise sayings and discourses upon great life-problems were to him as important as those groups of writers who embodied their religious ideas in law. Jesus was a student of life and interpreted life through his perfect understanding of God; but he was most appreciative of those men, his predecessors, who had honestly striven to know God and had interpreted life according to their highest conception of God.

It is from this point of view that in the series of studies which follows an attempt is made to present the books of the Old Testament as the expression of the life and thought of the Hebrew people. This does not mean that they are to be studied as ordinary literature, but rather as a unique collection having one primal purpose, with a history, and an influence on the past such as no other collection of books has had—more than that, capable of having an influence upon present thought and action second only to that of the New Testament.

### ORDER OF STUDY

Among all nations, the early literature has roots in the past in the form of oral traditions. A literature which has come down from very ancient times to the present day in any nation has an ancestry of written literature which is not available today in its ancient form. Among the Hebrews there existed, for centuries before there was written literature, oral traditions, poems, sayings and stories, and even connected cycles of stories which, little by little, passed into written form. Many of these may be discovered by a careful analysis of the books of the Old Testament.

The purpose of this course is not, however, to undertake the analytical work of the discovery of ancient documents, but using the results of discoveries to find in the books as they now stand the living people who carried on the ever growing consciousness of God as himself a moral being, and requiring in his people conduct in accordance with an ever developing sense of their obligation to such a God. For this reason the books of the Old Testament will be studied, so far as possible, in the order in which they either arose or most clearly represented the thought and life of a given period of Israel's history.

### EARLY FRAGMENTS

Before taking up definitely one of the books of the Old Testament as a whole, it will be interesting to consider an early fragment now found incorporated in a book of later origin. In Judges, chapter 5, we find one of the oldest bits of Hebrew poetry. Our study of it will help us to glimpse the spirit of the Hebrews very

early in the progress of their occupancy of the land of Canaan, the tribal life; lack of unity among the tribes, and independence in response to leadership against a common danger. We shall also see important aspects of their idea of God in those early days.

This fragment is a song ascribed to Deborah. Read 4:4, 5 and note that Deborah was known as a prophetess, and that under her palm tree in the hill country of Ephraim she was accustomed to give to her people the "oracle" of Jehovah. This fourth chapter gives us data which the writer of the book of Judges probably thought necessary to the understanding of the poem. It represents some characters in a somewhat different attitude from that in which the song presents them. Without it, however, we might not be able to picture to ourselves the events of the battle which the poem describes. It is very natural, that, as the years passed, stories of this battle differing in detail from the old poem or ode of victory appeared.

Read rapidly chapter 4, noting that Barak, a leader among the Hebrew people, is urged by Deborah to make war upon the Canaanites, who, under Jabin, their king, have been oppressing the Hebrew people, the captain of his army being Sisera. Note that his army is described as a multitude and that it is equipped with chariots of war. Notice in verse 11 the explanation of the friendly feeling between the Kenites and the Hebrews. Observe that the story locates the battle by the river Kishon, but gives no details of the defeat of the enemy except that their captain "fled away on his feet" and the Hebrews pursuing, completely annihilated his army. It is apparent that the writer was aware that all those for whom he was writing knew what happened to the army, and that it was not necessary for him to give that detail.

We should bear in mind that the process of peopling the land of Canaan by the Hebrews was a long and gradual one. The Canaanites dwelt in the desirable portions of the land, the fertile plains, near sources of water supply, good pasture, and agricultural land, and they had intrenched themselves in small cities. Canaan was itself at this time under the suzerainty of Egypt, each of its various native kings ruling over a single city with its dependent towns, but paying constant tribute in money and soldiers to Egypt.

The Hebrew tribes did not all enter Canaan at the same time, but in single tribes or groups of tribes locating themselves, as they found opportunity, in the most favorable positions that were available. This meant that they set up the "each-for-himself" policy, and it is very clearly reflected in the stories of this period. Lack of social spirit and responsibility extended to individuals as well as to tribes, for the writer of the book of Judges closes it with the statement that "every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

Letting your imagination dwell upon this time of turbulence, of passionate desire for personal aggrandizement, of lack of any sort of formal government, and upon a particular crisis in which a group of the Hebrew people under a strong leader attempted to throw off the yoke of a formidable Canaanitish oppressor, read the song which has been attributed to Deborah in chapter 5, as follows:

Read verses 2-5, suggesting the spirit of willingness in which the writer sees the cause of victory, and for which praise is given to Jehovah. Can you discover in verses 4 and 5 a reason for the defeat of an army depending upon chariots, in a location near the river Kishon? Is this the description of a great storm?

Read verses 6-8, suggesting the dangers of the highways, the lack of leadership, the disloyalty of the people to their God, and the absence of a healthy spirit of self-defense.

Read verses 9-11, where again the writer rejoices in the spirit of those who responded to the call of war.

Read verses 12-18, which rehearse in detail the response of the various tribes to the call. Notice that Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher were not among those tribes whose praises were sung. A study of the map will show that these tribes were those that were more remote from the seat of difficulty and felt no personal call to sacrifice themselves in the interest of fellow-tribes.

Read verses 19-23, where in another great note of triumph we are told the result of the storm. Meroz was a city meriting the curse because she did not join the Hebrews in the pursuit of the fleeing Sisera.

Read verses 24-28. Notice that Jael did not violate the law of ancient oriental hospitality by killing Sisera *after* he had eaten in her tent, but *before* he had eaten she struck him with the hammer which was used to drive the pins of the tent. The prose narrative differs here, but the poem seems the more probable.

Read verses 28-30. The writer here, with barbaric rejoicings in the sufferings of the enemies of Israel, pictures the waiting of the mother of Sisera for the return of her son with the spoils of war. Verse 31 closes the ode with a great sense of satisfaction in the present and the confidence that the future is in the hand of Jehovah.

This ode is difficult because of the unusual style and the many ideas strange to our civilization. Read it again, this time with the idea of catching the vividness, the splendid movement, like war itself—strong and rapid—the pictures which it presents to the imagination; the enthusiasm and the doubts of the summoned tribes; the war chariots struggling in the mire of the overflowing river; the pursuing Hebrews fighting on foot; the confident Jael; and back of it all the spirit of the writer, who, looking back at the events of this battle, sees God in the storm, and glories in the loyalty with which his power was supplemented by the tribes of the Hebrews.

We have spent a good deal of time in the study of this short poem, but it is one of the best illustrations of the literary ancestors of the books of the Bible. Read Numbers 21:17, where you will find another small fragment, the song of the well, which was doubtless sung on many occasions, for the digging of a well and the springing up of the water was a very important feature of life in a land where there were no rivers and water was difficult to secure.

## I AND II SAMUEL

We shall pass from fragments of literature to a book which appears in two sections in our present Bible and which probably contains the oldest continuous historical writing in the Old Testament, the books of Samuel. For these, too, we shall find that there were ancestors. The literary methods of the Hebrews were always primitive compared with modern times. They possessed fragments of great interest, songs and stories, accounts of great deeds and great crises, and these they wove together into a continuous narrative. Naturally they made comments; sometimes they discussed at length a situation and gave their philosophy in regard to it. These writers were not primarily concerned with giving comprehensive, detailed history such as we have today. They gave to their fellows such portions of the history as would present their view of God and his dealings with the Hebrew people either as a whole or as individuals. Sometimes, therefore, we may find ourselves differing from these collators in their opinion of causes, results, or characters.

The books of Samuel contain a combination of several cycles of older stories centering around the lives of four of Israel's great heroes: Samuel, Saul, Jonathan, and David. To the first eight chapters we shall give little attention, since they deal with the childhood of Samuel and a group of stories about the Ark, and just now we are primarily concerned with the four heroes.

Read I Sam. 9:1-10, and notice the tribe to which Saul belonged (one of the smaller tribes). What kind of a father had he? What were his own personal characteristics? What was the occasion of his visit to the man of God (Samuel)? Notice the primitive aspects of the prophet's work. At this point the seer of former days, who was regarded somewhat as a clairvoyant, is passing into the prophet who combines with his vision of God his own strong personal character and wisdom, but to whom is still offered a reward of silver for his wisdom.

Read verses 11-16 and notice that the prophet has evidently had in mind the need of his people, and that to him the thought of a king is not a new one. Possibly, also, Saul was already known to him. 3:19-4:1 would indicate Samuel's wide acquaintance with the people of Israel as well as position of influence.



Read 9:17—10:16, which presents the detailed account of the conversation of Samuel with Saul and of his anointing him to be king over Israel, Saul's return to his uncle and his silence concerning all that had passed between himself and the prophet, save the one fact that he had found the asses. Try to picture it in scenes as if being enacted before you. Listen in imagination to the dialogue.

What effect would such an interview have upon Saul? If he had kingly qualities, would they tend to develop? On the supposition that 10:17-27 is a later and different story read 11:1-11. Do we find here the opportunity which was needed to call forth the best in Saul? His neighbors, the men of Jabesh-Gilead, appealed to him for leadership against a common enemy. The fighting ended with victory, and as a result (v. 15) Saul was crowned king. Notice that Saul coupled the name of Samuel with his own in his call to arms, and that Samuel led in the movement to publicly proclaim Saul king. Was this an indication of perfect harmony between them?

It is difficult to appreciate, through the accounts which we have, the real attitude of Samuel toward the establishment of a kingdom. He probably regarded it as one of those onward movements of national progress which he saw himself powerless to check, in which he recognized the hand of God, and to which as a wise statesman he gave his guidance rather than opposition.

Read 13:2-7. Many years must have elapsed between our last narrative and this selection. Saul was then a young man. We here find him the father of a soldier son. He had introduced into his kingdom a military organization with three centers, Michmash, Bethel, and Geba. The Philistines on the southwestern border of Palestine were strong and prosperous, and thus far unconquerable. Saul's little kingdom which probably extended not much beyond the borders of Benjamin had become self-confident and aggressive. Jonathan, Saul's son, struck the first blow, initiating a policy of general warfare. Read 13:16-18, 23.

In 14:1-46 we have a vivid account of the exploits of Jonathan and the utter rout of the Philistines. The story is full of indications of primitive ideals, dependence upon the ark, the vow of fasting, the sacred lot. Think, as you read, how you would translate the human spirit of those days into modern terms. In the midst of all these ancient beliefs and primitive actions can we see the expression of the conviction of a just cause, dependence upon God, valiant leadership, the beginning of intertribal responsibility, and people who even in those superstitious times chose, in the saving of Jonathan, loyalty to a brave hero above the performance of a penalty which outraged their sense of justice?

Up to this point in the early narrative Saul has justified the confidence of his people, but apparently the passing of years, increased complications in his kingdom, perhaps also friction with Samuel, combined with a peculiar temperament, brought him to a condition which the men of his day termed "being troubled by an evil spirit." Read 16:14-23, noting that the illness of Saul is the occasion of David's coming to court.

Following this period, the interest and the affection of the compiler of our stories center about David, and Saul and Jonathan are used as "background" for the fortunes of David. It is interesting to ask, "Suppose there had been no David, would Saul have become a great king in the larger sense?" If not, what were some of the things which arrested his development? What indications have you seen that he was exceedingly superstitious; that he was not really self-reliant; that he was not constructive in relation to his kingdom; that war was largely a matter of self-defense at a time when the safety of his land demanded an aggressive type of campaign? We are trying to summarize his character at this point lest the attitude of the writers of the stories of David should lead us to do injustice to Saul. Are there men like Saul today in politics—men of one idea, with no broad vision, in religion unprogressive, clinging to the letter rather than developing the spirit, in society flaming into action only at the spur of imminent danger? Are there men who, giving great promise in their youth, grow old and selfish before their time, as Saul did? Is the tendency of Christianity to broaden the individual? Why? What can Christianity do for a man like Saul?

Again and again, as we continue our study of the Old Testament books, we shall find that with the passing years the names of great heroes become embroidered, as it were, with wonderful stories like jewels in a setting. These interest us greatly, but, not infrequently, they are stories which do not affect the essential character of the man or woman about whom they are related, as for instance, stories of his birth or childhood. Since our course must be limited in scope we shall pass over some of these lightly. I Samuel, 17:1—18:4, however, gives us a story of David's youth which we must read for pure pleasure. Since we have already learned that he came to the court of Saul for the purpose of soothing the king's distemper, we shall read this story not as an account of his presentation to Saul, but as a thrilling tale to which lovers of David have listened, open-mouthed, for over thirty centuries. In ancient times it was not infrequently the custom to substitute for a battle between armies a duel between chosen representatives on either side. Verses 34-37 of this story give an opportunity for a play of imagination about the life of the youthful David, even more fruitful than the story of the contest with the giant. Try to create a story from the suggestion of these verses.

Read 18:5-8. Is it not probable that we have here in condensed form a statement which represents the growth of David in the esteem of the people, and the gradual development of jealousy and apprehension on the part of Saul? The lapse of time as seen in such verses as 5-9 and between 16 and 17 helps us to understand that these short stories are not necessarily in chronological order, but might easily be begun by such phrases as "at another time" or "one day."

Read verses 10-13 and note that the writer is continually setting David's poise, his wisdom, his generosity, over against Saul's "ravings" (see margin), his jealousy, his fitful spirit of revenge.

Read verses 17-29. The story of David's marriage to the daughter of Saul, and 19:11-17, which tells us how she saved his life. Note the skill of the storyteller which can easily be tested by trying to tell the story in other language and with different dialogue. The "teraphim" was probably a wooden household god, rudely shaped like a man. It was found in many Israelitish homes at this time.

The stories of the flight of David are somewhat confused, but we gather that aided by even the priests at the sanctuaries he came to a Philistine city on the borders of Judah, 21:10-22:3. (The exact location of Gath is not known.) He was "in and out," so to speak, wandering with a growing band of retainers, some of them possibly outlaws like himself, but keeping in touch with Achish. In 22:6-19 is related one of the worst examples of Saul's revengeful spirit.

Read 23:14-29 narrating a hairbreadth escape of David after the Ziphites had betrayed his whereabouts to Saul. The respite was but a brief one. Does 24:2 suggest that the king was using in his pursuit an army, while David had only a roving band such as could live upon the neighborhood where it happened to be?

A very interesting story of the method by which David and his men secured food and the necessities of life is found in 25:2-42. Notice the polite message to Nabal in which, however, David assumes that to have taken nothing from and done no injury to Nabal's shepherds is conduct deserving of reward. Possibly however, his band had offered them protection from wandering Bedouin tribes. The character and amount of largesse is left to Nabal's courtesy. Note the change in David's attitude upon receiving Nabal's curt reply, verse 13. Do verses 13-17 suggest that Nabal had violated customary hospitality to an extent which even his own servants could not tolerate? The speech of the wise Abigail is like sweet music to David's ears. Study it carefully, and follow its argument. Was David known to Abigail? What had she heard about him? Why did her speech appeal so strongly to him? Note its magical effect. This has been characterized as the most dignified, appropriate, and winning speech of any woman in the Old Testament. The remote sequel, verses 39-42, is like the happy ending of a fairy tale.

A comparison of 23:19-24 with 26:1, 2 seems to indicate that they belong to the same story. Although the events which follow in chapters 24 and 26 are somewhat different, the point is the same. David having an unexpected opportunity to avenge his wrongs and to take the life of the king, spares him. Read chapter 26 as the most interesting, and possibly the original, of the two stories. This story is so familiar that you must read it the more carefully and with much imagination in order to appreciate its real significance. As you read recall all that David had endured at the hand of Saul, long banishment, repeated attempts upon his life, years of harassing pursuit. What did banishment mean to David



who thought of Jehovah as dwelling only in Palestine? verses 19, 20. Try to analyze the feelings of David throughout this period. Do we see here, as frequently before, a certain courtesy and dignity that is stronger than passion, that commands our admiration and shows David never defeated in spirit or lacking in self-command, although often frustrated in his plans? Do we also appreciate his sense of the sanctity of the king's person which only a deeply religious man would have honored under such circumstances?

We must stop a moment here to note a mention, in 25:1, of the death of Samuel. The author had little to tell us of the last years of the austere old prophet who was not destined to see a successor to the king whom he had chosen, but that his memory was revered and that he was counted as a true spokesman for Jehovah is clearly evidenced by the story in chapter 28.

Read 27:1-7 which opens a series of stories of David dwelling in Philistine cities and fighting for the Philistines—that is, making his living for himself with his followers as mercenary soldiers according to the custom of ancient times. Read verses 8-12, and note how “to make himself safe” with Achish he tries to make Achish believe that he has been fighting the Israelites, when in reality his raid was upon old enemies of the Hebrew people as well as of the Philistines. Would you call this lying or stratagem? Remember the rudeness of the times and the lack of moral standards. How can you account for the acceptance of David by the Philistines? Remember his previous battles with them. Read chapter 29, which gives us assurance that David was never compelled to fight against his own people, although the Philistines were again opening aggressive warfare upon the Israelites.

In 30:3-25, we find another delightful story of David's alertness and readiness for any emergency, as well as of his wisdom and tact. Read it carefully and consider every detail, picturing it as you read. Recall how the principle stated in verse 24 might have been applied to the home-workers in our own recent war. Was this a new ideal in ancient warfare? How did David's contemporaries regard it? Why did David make such a disposition of his own spoils of war as that recorded in verses 26-31? Would he be likely to do such a thing with only a friendly aim?

Chapters 28 and 31 will suggest that David and Saul, each in his own spirit, were anticipating the defeat of Saul's army and the death of David's enemy. It is thus that we would have expected Saul to act. Think over his life as a whole and justify your estimate of him. Recall a previous summary. Does it now seem to you fair?

Note that there is no logical division between I and II Samuel, and that 1:1-16 continues our narrative and tells us how the news of Saul's death was brought to David in Ziklag, two days after his return. This is a different story from that of I Samuel, 31, which tells us that Saul fell upon his own sword. There

would doubtless be many different stories about so important a matter as the death of Israel's first king. Our author has given us but two. More important than the details of these stories is the song taken from the ancient book of Jasher, found in verses 19-27. Read it again and again until you feel the mournful cadence of this funeral dirge, shot through with appreciation of the greatness of Saul and the affection of David for Jonathan.

To read a book of the Bible through at one sitting is a new and interesting experience to many. The second book of Samuel is more free from some of those characteristics which make the first book difficult, such as duplicate accounts, uncertain chronology, and the like. II Samuel, 2:20, reads smoothly and easily as a continuous and very ancient story. Try the experiment of reading it through as if it were entirely new to you. In no other way can you so clearly visualize the events of the passing years during which David, the king, organized his kingdom, conquered his enemies, acquired territory, accepted the love and homage of his people, received the rebuke of Jehovah for his rare self-indulgence, experienced sporadic rebellions, and the sorrows of a divided household, but in the main carried out so wise, so generous, and so strong a policy that at his death he left a large and prosperous kingdom to his son Solomon, and through all the later history of his people was quoted as the type of the ideal king.

Having done this rapid reading, return to chapter 2, and read again verses 2-4; 8-11, noting the limits of David's first kingdom and the fact that for more than seven years there was a rival king to the north of him.

Do you recognize in David's habitual "inquiring of Jehovah," though done through a priest and by means of an ephod, the spirit of modern prayer and the desire to please Jehovah not alone for the sake of material blessing which was expected but for the peace of soul which comes as a result of harmony with the will of God.

Under Abner, the captain of the hosts of Saul's descendants, and Joab, captain of David's hosts, a long-continued war was carried on intensified by a blood feud which was established between Joab and Abner by the killing of Joab's brother, Asahel. Read II Samuel, 2:12-3:1. The continued weakening of Saul's former kingdom under his son, Mephibosheth, lead at last to a conspiracy on the part of Abner to deliver the kingdom to David. Doubtless Abner expected a high place in the united kingdom, perhaps even Joab's own place as the captain of David's hosts.

Read 3:6-21 which relate the peaceful negotiations. The death of Abner at the hands of Joab ended the personal ambitions of Abner, for whom David commanded mourning as for a great man, verses 31-39. One cannot help reflecting upon Joab's state of mind at this time. Read chapter 4 and note David's consistency in condemning to death all those who had slain the king of the north, weak though he was, even as he had commanded the death of the man who claimed to have slain Saul.

The leaders of the rival kingdom being out of the way, the representatives of "all Israel" had no obstacles to overcome in asking David to rule over them. Picture the scene as described in 5:1-5.

Read 5:6-11 which describes the capture and the beautification of the military city of Jerusalem, until then in the hands of the Jebusites, and its establishment as a new capital of Israel. Does verse 12 seem especially significant as a key to the success of David? If so, why?

Read verses 17-25 which indicate that the Philistines were not pleased at the strengthening of the kingdom under David. Attempting to conquer it, they were driven away.

Chapter 8 gives a summary of David's conquests which indicates that not only were the Philistines subdued, but successful war was carried into all the surrounding countries. Note that David's kingdom stretched as far north as Hamath in Syria and included Moab and Edom on the east. Locate these regions on a map.

To return to the new capital, chapter 6 gives us a story which can only be understood in the light of the religious ideas of ancient Israel. The ark from very early times had been to the Hebrew people the symbol of Jehovah's presence. Turn to I Samuel and read chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7:1, 2, which present a group of stories about the ark that will help us to appreciate the superstitious awe with which it was regarded and also its sacred character. To David in his capital, the presence of the ark would mean the presence of Jehovah and an assurance of the ability to consult him at the most sacred source at any time. Read 6:1-19, letting the scene appear before you as the ark is brought from its resting-place of twenty years at Kiriath-jearim to a place prepared for it in Jerusalem where it was to grace the royal sanctuary of King David. Many have regarded Psalm 24 as an antiphonal psalm, sung upon or in memory of this very important occasion.

David's characteristic kindness and loyalty to his friends finds new expression in the story of chapter 9. "His international" politeness is not appreciated by the Ammonites, chapter 10, but disaster follows their refusal to keep the peace.

11:1-12:23 presents a story of David stamped with the keenest disapproval, of the author, yet reported by him. Why? Was it because in this story he found a key to later disasters in David's life for which he thought it necessary to give a reason? Or would he, if he had been called upon to name his books, have entitled them, "How God dealt with Samuel, Saul, and David?" If the latter is true and the author has written a religious treatise, he could not, even for the love of David, omit this story.

Read the selection, noting that David did not at this time go, as was customary with kings, to battle. Was his tarrying in Jerusalem an indication of selfishness unusual in him? In the story of verses 2-27 is not personal gratification the supreme motive? The skill in making plans which had so frequently served David in good cause was now employed in an eminently successful way in this

evil enterprise. Is it always the case that intellect devoted to evil is infinitely more harmful than simple-minded brutality? In order to judge fairly, one must recall that he was an absolute monarch living in days when kings might do what they would.

But David had ruled his people with an unselfish and just temper. He was now violating the law of his own soul. Tissot, the artist, vividly presents the situation when he pictures David alone on the housetop among its rich furnishings with bowed head, despondent, self-convicted, when Nathan, his court prophet appears to him. Nathan's parable of rebuke, 12:1-5, is one of the most effective in the Bible, and its interpretation, severe as it was, found affirmation in David's own conscience, verses 7-15. It seems fitting that following the last chapter in this episode, verses 16-25, David follows Joab's preemptory summons to war and comes back to Jerusalem in triumph.

There is no doubt that the author desired his readers to see a direct connection between the sin of David and the family troubles which followed, and it is not difficult for us to see the probability that David's self-indulgent attitude had rendered him lax in more ways than one, and weakened his hold upon the members of his family.

Just when it "came to pass" that Absalom, perhaps the most attractive of the king's sons, began to think of himself as his father's successor we cannot tell. The quarrel between himself and his brother related in chapter 13 and the urgency with which Absalom desired the presence of the king's sons at his feast, verses 23-29, suggest at least that he had in mind the destruction of all the heirs to the throne. He succeeded only in killing Amnon. The immediate result, the flight of Absalom, seems to have affected the king more than the death of Amnon.

Joab had more than once shown himself to be master of a situation in which he wished to influence the king. Read chapter 14, which tells us of the ruse by which he helped the king to make up his own mind in regard to allowing Absalom to return to Jerusalem, but for two full years David refused to look upon the face of his son. Notice in the closing verse of this chapter that it is Joab again who finally prevails upon the king to see Absalom and apparent reconciliation is effected.

In chapter 15, however, we find that Absalom was only seeking an opportunity to instigate open rebellion, and that at every opportunity he sought to win the people to his standard. Notice that the word "forty years" in verse 7 has a marginal reading of "four," which is more likely. Read carefully the story of the consummation of the conspiracy resulting in the flight of the king, accompanied by his household and several bands of loyal retainers from his army. It is full of suggestions of personal affection for the king, on the part of individuals, and of patient forbearance and sorrow on the part of David. Note how frequently the kindnesses done to David are directly related to favors which he himself has



done to others in the past. Chapters 16 and 17 continue the story which is full of exciting incidents.

Note in chapter 18 how David's warriors refused to let him go with them to battle against Absalom. They could not trust the old man's kind heart when it came to disposing of the rebel son. This same chapter tells us how, caught in a tree, Absalom is put to death by Joab, although David's last words had been, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man."

There is no story in the Old Testament more beautifully told than that of the carrying of the news of Absalom's death to David, and his consequent grief. We are greatly impressed with the tact of Ahimahaz who, knowing well what had befallen others who had slain kings and princes, yet begged that he might be the one to break the sad news to the king whom he loves. Notice the difference between the way in which he handles the situation, verses 28, 29, and the curt message of the Cushite.

There is indication in chapter 19 that David, absorbed in his grief for his son, came well-nigh failing to handle the situation, but urged by Joab he turned to the people, 19:11—20:3. The story of the king's journey back to Jerusalem is full of thrilling incident but is marked by a wonderful lack of revengeful spirit on the part of the king.

Although Joab had put to death the king's son and verse 13 of chapter 19 has told us that another is to be put in his place, the old warrior takes matters again into his own hands and kills his own probable successor, and in verse 23 we find that he is again "over all the hosts of Israel."

The remainder of our book has no special continuity. In the latter part of chapter 23, however, we find a little story which is wonderfully suggestive. It is one of those simple stories which help us to see the cause of the large number of personal relationships which David established, based on sincere affection. The story, verses 13—17, purports to be about three famous generals of David's. It is undated except that it belongs to a period when the Philistines were at war with Israel and encamped in Bethlehem. Read it over and over again. Does it not represent a delicacy of feeling, a regard for human life which must have been very rare in the days of David? What idea of God lies back of the pouring of the offering upon the ground?

David's appointment of his successor and the story of his own death are recorded in the opening chapter of another book. If you wish to read them at this point, see 1:1—10 of the first book of Kings.

Can we now formulate in modern terms some of the religious values of these two Old Testament Books? Test the following by what you have learned:

1. A single book of the Old Testament may contain duplication and even differing statements about some event or character. These differences are of value to us because they reflect the ideas of different writers in different periods of

history. They also reveal the ancient habit of producing new literature through the compilation of older documents.

2. The writers of these books had a religious purpose in which they were primarily interested and which governed the selection of their material.

3. These discoveries suggest to us freedom to explore these books to find out for ourselves the real characters that precede the stories and to re-estimate them for ourselves.

4. Character is what a person is. What a person does is influenced by the ideas and customs of the times in which he lives. His greatness should be measured by the extent to which he transcends the ideals of his times and acts in such manner as to establish a new and higher standard of conduct.

In Old Testament times there were men who, great in character, led the Hebrew people to new and greater heights of temporal prosperity and spiritual idealism.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Have you read all the biblical selections required in this study?
2. Why is it important to the understanding of Christianity that one should have a fair knowledge of the Old Testament?
3. What do we mean by an early "fragment"?
4. What is the subject of the "Song of Deborah"?
5. Who was Deborah and what connection had she with the story?
6. Give five or more characteristics of the song.
7. In what books do we find possibly the earliest consecutive historical writing?
8. Of what are these books composed?
9. About what principal characters are the stories grouped?
10. In which of these characters does the author have the deepest interest?
11. Give your own summary of the character of Samuel.
12. Give a similar estimate of the character of Saul.
13. How far did natural disposition count in the cases of each of the four heroes of the book?
14. Can Christian character modify temperament? If so, how?
15. Select five or more events in the life of David which seem most significant from the point of view of character.
16. What did David accomplish for the Hebrew people?
17. In what ways did character enter into the accomplishment of these things?
18. Can you express David in terms of a man in the United States today?
19. What were David's religious ideals about God; worship; conduct?
20. Were they above or below the average of his times, Joab's or Saul's for instance?
21. Can you describe a religious man of today who might be as praiseworthy in our present day as David was in his?
22. What have you gained from the study of the books of Samuel?

## STUDY II

## EARLY STORIES AND TRADITIONS

## GENESIS, EXODUS, NUMBERS, JOSHUA

In entering upon our second study we need to be reminded that we are trying to see how Israel's *literature* grew. We are not therefore making a systematic study of the history of Israel, although a considerable knowledge of the history is necessary to an understanding of the literature.

We have already discovered that the writers of the books of the Bible had primarily a religious purpose. History has shown us repeatedly that the literature of any nation develops by fits and starts; and also that after a great national crisis, political, civil, or religious, there frequently follows unusual literary activity. It is impossible to have a certainty of knowledge about many things relating to the Hebrew literature which can, however, with good grounds be surmised.

The ninth century B.C. saw a great political and religious crisis which we must now understand, for following it and perhaps to some extent as a result of it there came the collection of a great body of scattered stories, chronicles, laws, and poems—the heritage of the past at last presented in a connected history of Israel, largely compiled but also edited, and reaching even back of the history of Israel, including the national stories regarding the origin of the human race.

Since the days of David much had happened in Palestine, for a knowledge of which we must go to the Books of Kings, to which we shall in the succeeding months frequently refer but which we shall not at this time discuss as literature.

Solomon, succeeding his father, I Kings 1:32-40, brought great changes to the people who had admired, loved, and followed King David. In adopting the policy of ancient monarchs of his time, he brought to the kingdom great glory but also new hardships. His building operations, among which were his palace and the temple of Jehovah, required the employment, including enforced labor, of thousands. Read I Kings 5:1-14. The kingdom was organized in districts for the support of an extravagant household on a royal scale, 4:1-28; foreign alliances by marriage were made, 3:1, according to the custom of the times. Such alliances meant the adoption or the tolerance of foreign gods, 11:1-8. The people of Israel, in this agricultural stage of their national development, were not ready for such an undemocratic type of government and life.

At the death of Solomon, Rehoboam, his son, promising no improvement, was rejected as king by all but the tribe of Judah, and a new capital was established in northern Israel. The two kingdoms existed side by side for practically two centuries. In Judah the Davidic line continued in succession, but the throne of northern Israel passed from its first revolutionary king, Jeroboam to his son,

Nadab, who was assassinated after two years with all his household by a conspirator, who held the throne twenty-four years and bequeathed it to his son. History repeating itself brought assassination at the end of two years, and a conspirator one of the chief military men of the kingdom reigned.

Within seven days, civil war brought the elevation of two candidates of the people, one of whom, Omri, finally was placed upon the throne, and remained there for twelve years. During that period he strengthened and extended his territory, built Samaria and made it his capital, and at his death left to his son Ahab a somewhat stable kingdom.

Meantime in Judah, although the throne had passed peacefully from father to son and to grandson, the country had been invaded by Shishak of Egypt, and had been constantly at war with northern Israel over territorial questions, even entering into an alliance with Syria (lying to the northeast with Damascus as its capital,) against northern Israel. Temporarily, through the help of Syria, northern Israel was driven back. But so long as the two kingdoms existed there were frequent recurrences of suspicion and ill feeling which not infrequently flamed up in active warfare.

It was in a divided nation like this that we find Ahab, son of Omri, king of northern Israel at about 875 B.C., and it was the crisis which he precipitated that brought into vigorous action those prophets of Jehovah who dared to defy the king. Read the story of the reign of Ahab in I Kings 16:29-32. This is a meager account of a national crisis which was full of significance for the political and religious history of Israel.

In order to understand this crisis we must realize that in this early time Israel was quite satisfied to regard Jehovah as her God alone. Other nations had their gods as she supposed, but in time of war all were enemies of Jehovah, and every battle won was a victory of Jehovah over one or more of these foreign gods.

As the people of Israel had gradually come into the possession of Canaan they had adopted as places of worship for their God, Jehovah, many of the old shrines on the hilltops. The worship of Jehovah was simple and austere in comparison with the old idol worship of the land. Jehovah's demands, as interpreted by the prophets, had been for loyalty, courage, and obedience expressed in deeds, and sacrificial offerings were made in simple fashion rather than with the extravagant and sensual rites of the old sanctuaries. In other words, Israel still worshiped a wilderness God in much the simple way in which he had been worshiped in their years of wandering.

Now, however, the people had come into a permanent home, had developed agriculture, and were seeking commercial opportunities which must entail peaceful relations with other nations.

Would not the question naturally arise as to whether a wilderness God would be equal to the needs of the people in their new environment? Many had already said, "No"; and while not ceasing to worship Jehovah, had adopted the Canaanitish Baals as their gods as well. For was not the Baal of the land an agricultural



god? Had he not been bringing increase of flocks and herds and crops to the Canaanites for centuries? Would he not do so for Israel?

The prophets had disapproved, and time and again had interpreted past disasters as the result of Jehovah's anger (read Judges 3:7, 8, 6:7-10 and similar passages) but the people had not been deeply impressed.

In the days of Ahab matters reached a crisis. The marriage of the king to a Phoenician princess from the kingdom of the north (with which Israel had had friendly relations since the days of Solomon) was, in Ahab's judgment, only a way of cementing an old and favorable political alliance, now for commercial reasons especially desirable. That Jezebel should establish at the capital a sanctuary of her Phoenician Baal was a matter of course. A political alliance involved an alliance of the gods of the nations concerned. The worship of Jezebel's god, although imported from Phoenicia, was very like the worship of the Canaanitish Baals; and backed by the queen's influence and the rich accompaniments of royal sanctuaries, Baalism became exceedingly popular.

To Ahab this was all to the advantage of the kingdom. It gave added strength to have two gods, especially when one was that of a powerful neighboring nation. Ahab was a wise politician. Increasing commerce with Phoenicia was most desirable. His building operations needed the assistance of Phoenician skilled craftsmen. His new city of Jezreel must be beautified by their handiwork. He doubtless congratulated himself upon this alliance, especially as it would give him a convenient ally in case of trouble with the Syrians on the northeast.

But the prophets of Jehovah saw in this divided allegiance not only dishonor to Israel's God but also the introduction, on a great scale, of ideals and conduct sanctioned by Baalism, which they felt would destroy the religion of Jehovah. The glamor of Baalism under the queen's patronage would carry the people with it. They threw themselves into a righteous contest in which Jezebel used her power to the utmost, and prophets of Jehovah were persecuted and driven out of the land in large numbers. The Books of Kings provide us our data. Recall the problem. Could Jehovah bring crops, increase of flocks and all those things which accompany successful agriculture?

Read I Kings 17:1-7. Picture to yourself Elijah, the prophet, a man without permanent abode, going from place to place, living the abstemious life of a nomad, more at home in the wilderness than in the cities which were rapidly developing in Palestine.

To him, with his spectator's view of all that was going on in the kingdom, it seemed that the time had come when Jehovah must declare himself to be the master of the elements, and he defiantly affirms that neither dew nor rain can come except by the act of Jehovah.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> About the name of this great man gathered many stories. Doubtless those which follow in chapter 17 are representatives of a large collection which have not come down to us but which were ample evidence of the great honor in which Elijah was held.

Read the story of the drought, contained in chapter 18. Picture its severity suggested in verses 1-6; notice also that although the queen's mandate had banished her antagonists, the prophets of Jehovah, they had sympathizers in the king's household. One wonders, did Ahab himself worship Baal? It is clear as the story goes on that he never lost his fear of Jehovah; and it should be noted that he named his children after Jehovah. Read verses 7-15, the meeting of Elijah with Obadiah, and verses 16-19, the encounter of Ahab, and Elijah's challenge.

The story which follows, verses 20-46, is so vivid that one can picture every detail up to the moment when, his confidence in Jehovah having been vindicated both by fire and rain, Elijah stands in defiant triumph in the gate of Jezreel, where the king seeks shelter from the rain.

Chapter 19:1-14 pictures a type of reaction which not infrequently torments great souls after some extraordinary effort. But in the midst of Elijah's despair he sees the way out, a new king, a new prophet, and the strengthening of the many who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Read verses 15-18.

The picturesqueness of the Baal contest fascinates us, but Elijah more truly stands as a forerunner of the great prophets in another story. Read chapter 21 and consider the king's desire, the independent spirit of Naboth and his loyalty to the land custom of his country, the machinations to which Jezebel was forced to resort through fear of public sentiment, Elijah's rebuke and his curse of Ahab.

Social justice, the right of the subject as well as the king, of the poor man as well as the rich, of the weak as well as the strong, the rights of plain people as over against a privileged class—for these Elijah stands firm. Did the religion of Jehovah mean that to Elijah, and was the moral dominance of Jehovah more significant to him even than the physical manifestations on Mount Carmel?

Upon the religious leaders of Israel hung the destiny of the nation at this moment and it was inevitable that they should seek other means of reaching the people than the spoken word, which was forbidden.

There were already in existence, besides scattered fragments, two well-known collections of stories and traditions, songs and records in a somewhat chronological order, compilations from two sources, one from Judah and one from northern Israel. To reinterpret these early histories and laws in the light of the newer ideas of God to which the prophets of these times had risen was the task to which some of the great religious leaders whose names are unknown to us set themselves in this century. We shall find these two collections in our books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua, where they have had many later additions.

In studying these books, we shall not attempt to analyze them into their original parts but recognizing this origin as the cause of duplications and inconsistencies which might otherwise trouble us, and which having accounted for we can dismiss, our aim will be rather to find out the sort of people that existed

back of these records, and the kind of God that the prophets who compiled them were trying to expound to their people.

In reading these books we shall find frequently injected into the interesting narrative, genealogical tables, statistics, and other somewhat dry and uninteresting sections. We have often been impatient of this, not realizing that here were the indications of the introduction of precious tribal and family records, which were to the Hebrews as significant as any other portions of their history. These records, however, were of much later origin than the early histories of northern Israel and Judah, which we wish particularly to explore through the books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua. So we shall feel at liberty to pass them over.

Our aim is to see what religious and moral ideas actuated the prophets of the century of which we have just had a glimpse in the Elijah stories, and how their ideas of God and conduct appear in the literature which they used.

Read Genesis 2:4—3:24, a story of the origin of man having many similarities with other stories found in the literatures of Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, and other ancient nations. This story differentiates itself from all the others, however, by the manner in which the story is used. As you read, raise the following questions: (a) Was the author most interested in the *manner* of the creation of man—an idea familiar to all his readers—or in the fact of the *existence of disobedience to God*—a condition which he believed reached back to the beginning of the race? (b) Is it that particular sin in the garden or sin in his own day that is chiefly troubling the writer? (c) What is the climax of the story? (d) How does the story end? (e) What does the author hope to achieve by putting this story into this interesting and beautiful form and making it a more effective part of the literature of his times? (f) Are the steps in the story psychologically sound? (g) Is this the natural history of every sinful act? (h) If so, what is the religious value of this story today?

Read chapter 4 and note that it concerns two brothers and ends with the building of a city, verse 17, and the introduction of the arts of civilization. Was there possibly an original story similar to the many of ancient times gathering around the building of cities—a story well known to the people? The writer has given a deeply religious significance to the story through its moral aspects, involving not only man's attitude to God, but brotherly conduct of man to man. Is that a useful ideal in modern times?

In chapters 6–9 there is one of the most interesting and easily discernible examples of the combination of two differing stories of the same event. Read 6:9–21; 7:6, 11, 13–16, 18–21, 24; 8:1–2a, 3b–5, 13, 14–18; 9:1–17. These passages give us a fairly connected story ending in a covenant with Noah, which precludes a possibility of the recurrence of the flood, the covenant being sealed by the appearance of a rainbow. By surrounding these passages with a pencil

mark one can easily see what remains and find another complete story of the flood which culminates in 8:20-22, where Jehovah's covenant with Noah promised the regular recurrence of the agricultural seasons "while the world shall last."

Make note of other differences as they appear to you, not because they are especially significant from the point of view of the story, but because they show so clearly that the editor did not wish to do injustice to either of the stories so gave us both, thus adding to the richness of our knowledge of the origins of Hebrew literature.

From the religious point of view both stories teach the positive side of the quality of obedience, and by a story of the results of disobedience in the Garden of Eden and a story of the results of obedience, side by side, the writer makes his meaning doubly clear.

The story in Genesis 11:1-9 we may read and pass over as presenting in general ideas of God upon which we must place a forced meaning in order to get a religious value for today.

Note that thus far the stories in the book of Genesis have dealt with the beginnings of the human race. What is the meaning of the word "Genesis"?

Our next chapters present stories of the ancestors of the Hebrew people. We have of course only a few of the stories which were current at that time. Let us see if we can discover the religious purpose in the selection of these particular stories. Read 12:1-10, and note the story of Abram's migration from his ancient home in Haran to southern Palestine—a settlement interrupted by a famine which drove him temporarily to Egypt. Verses 11-20 give a story the purpose of the inclusion of which we cannot quite see. But the reason of the selection of a particular event is often difficult to discern at the present remote day. We must remember that the author was writing for his own people and times. Read 13:5-18. Surely here we are expected to see that this was a journey having in the purpose of God a definite aim of benefit to mankind, and Abram felt himself to be in harmony with the will of God for him.

Read chapter 15. This was doubtless a very comforting story in the days when ancient Israel was facing diminishing territory and the incursion of the Syrians from the northeast.

Note in 16:14 the name of a Well, meaning "God of seeing." The family story in chapter 16 tells us why the well bore that name. Read 18:1-33, a charming old story of angelic visitors in disguise, who after blessing the household of Abram by a wonderful promise proceeded to pronounce Jehovah's curse upon wicked Sodom—a curse which Abram's kindly heart agonized to avert.

Read 21:2a, 6, 7, recording the birth of Isaac; verse 8, the weaning feast, 9-21, the jealousy of Sarah and its consequences. Verse 31 gives us the name Beersheba and verses 22-33 another story of the origin of a name.

Chapter 22:1-19 contains the choicest of all the old stories of Abraham. Worn smooth and beautiful by frequent telling, this story places the ban of the prophets upon the custom of human sacrifice, which was not uncommon among ancient nations, and is even suspected to have existed in Israel. This is the climax of the Abraham stories. Do they suggest the hand of God in the life of the individual, leading him for the benefit of the race; and the beauty and dignity of harmony with the divine will? How much more than this did the author wish his own people to see?

With chapter 24 we take up a cycle of stories, relating to Isaac. Comment upon the charming story of Isaac and Rebecca would be superfluous. Broaden your interest in this story by noting how much it reveals of ancient customs and ideals. Was marriage a light or an undignified matter among these socially primitive people? Why such care in the choice of a wife? Is there here something for us to think about in our modern careless freedom of action?

Read 25:21-34. This story is interrupted by chapter 26 which relates an incident of Isaac almost identical with one connected with Abraham and Pharaoh in 12:10-20. Is it not probable that there was originally but one incident and that as the years passed it was told in some places as relating to Isaac and in others as relating to Abraham? Our author in his loyalty to his materials used both accounts. Read the whole story (26:1-33) and notice that here also is a variation of the account of the origin of the name of the well Beersheba. It is very easy to appreciate how these different stories might arise in a day when they were freely passed from mouth to mouth with very little use of the written word.

Read 27:1-45, the last of the stories of Isaac and one of the most important stories of Jacob, that son who was destined to become the successor of Isaac and the founder of the tribes of Israel. In judging Jacob take into consideration the current ideas of his times and of tribal life. Was Esau fulfilling his obligation as the older son? Is Jacob an illustration of the New Testament phrase, "To him that hath shall be given and from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath?"

To appreciate the real enormity of Jacob's sin one must remember the high regard in which the father of the family in ancient times was held. Doubtless in the mind of the writer to deceive the father was a worse offense than to take advantage of the brother. It was also, on the face of it, an attempt to circumvent what the author believed to be the divine will of Jehovah, although he has come to see through events of later history that this was a providential ordering of the circumstances of Jacob's life.

Chapters 29, 30, and 31 relate with primitive simplicity and frankness the events of those years in which the fugitive Jacob labored for his uncle Laban in the land of Haran. Read 29:1-30, the story of Jacob's love for Rachel, the second daughter of Laban, culminating in his marriage with her. Read 30:25-42, the



account of Jacob's struggles to take advantage of his employer because he felt he was not getting his just due. The story is suggestive of modern life in the fields of capital and labor, for certainly Laban, the capitalist, was not guiltless. But the final parting is harmonious, 31:22—32:2, and Jacob's fear is directed away from Laban to the homeland and the territory of Esau which lay between it and him. Read 32:3—20, the preparations for meeting Esau, and chapter 33, the story of their peaceful encounter ending in Jacob's settlement in Shechem.

At this point the Jacob stories pass into the stories of which Joseph is the principal character. Joseph was the son of Rachel (30:25) as also was Benjamin (35:16—18).

Read chapter 37, the story of the youth of Joseph, the partiality of the father and the jealousy of the brothers which resulted in the enslavement of Joseph in Egypt. Skip chapter 38 as having nothing to do with Joseph and continue the story in chapter 39 and following, until the happy issue in the departure of Jacob for Egypt in 46:5 and Joseph's welcome, the account of which begins in 46:28. If you are interested to do so read the remainder of the book closing with the death of Jacob and the promise of Joseph's children that at his death his bones shall be carried to the family sepulchre in the land of Canaan.

Shall we pause here for a moment to take account of the religious teaching which these stories would convey to the people of Israel in later times? There must have been a very deep impression (1) that their history was a God-ordered history; (2) that to act in harmony with the will and purpose of God brought satisfaction to the individual and a sense of fulfilment of life; (3) that to violate or to go contrary to the purpose of Jehovah brought at least temporary disaster and sometimes complete failure in life. (4) To know the will of Jehovah was all important.

The details of the lives of these old patriarchs are full of primitive ideas of God, of strange customs and different standards of morals from those which our best ideals of the present day represent. But taken in the large, is not the message of these writings to us what it was to the people of ancient times? God in history, the God-ordered task of the individual, the joy of harmonious working with God and the sense of the fulness of life in harmony with him, the dissatisfactions and the cross-currents of life apart from him, the ugliness of selfishness, the beauty of self-sacrifice—these shine out of the old records and are abundantly confirmed by the centuries of history intervening.

There is no real break between the books of Genesis and Exodus. The narrative continues with only a suggestion of the passage of time in the change of kings. How unlike a modern historian! Read Exodus, 1:8—2:22, which gives us the common version of the birth, flight from Egypt, and marriage of Moses, who was to be the servant of Jehovah in bringing his people out of the servitude into which they had fallen in the changing dynasties of Egypt.

Chapter 3 and 4:1-17 tell graphically and with the imagery and ideas current in those days, the story of the conviction of Moses that he should undertake to bring about the deliverance of his people. Jethro, his father-in-law, tells him to go in peace, verse 18, and a conference with Aaron follows, verses 27-31. Is this the picture of a man great in his simplicity, and hesitant only because of the enormity of the task? Turn back to chapter 1 for a moment and let your imagination dwell upon the usefulness of the Hebrews in Egypt and the probability of the Pharaoh's hostile attitude toward their project? 5:1-21 gives still more harrowing details. How does his encounter with Pharaoh affect Moses? 5:22-6:1. Continue the reading with 7:14-18 and 20b-21a; 23-25, the first episode of the blood-red river which is evidence that Jehovah can work for the deliverance of his people even in the land of Egypt.

Other plagues follow: 8:1-4, 8-15; 8:20-31; 9:1-7; 13-35; 10:1-20, 21-23; 11:1-10; 12:29-36; 13:3-19, 21, 22, with increasing discrimination between Hebrews and Egyptians.

The story in the following chapters is about as familiar to us as to the ancient Hebrews, but let us try to look at it from their point of view. Read 14:5-7, 10-14, 19-21, 24-25, 27, 30-31, the story of the safe crossing of the Red Sea.

This story is more frequently alluded to, in later Hebrew history, than any other of the ancient stories. The details of the weeks or months in which Moses was trying to persuade the Hebrew people to follow his leadership and make their escape are not of first concern. His inciting rebellion among them, a rebellion which culminated in their final escape, is the important historical event about which many stories must have gathered. We are grateful that we have this one thrilling series of stories which enable us to picture in our imagination great encounters between the Hebrew leaders and the Egyptian rulers and a final statement of a migration, in which, led by the hand of God, the Hebrews came to regions of freedom and comparative safety, in which they could develop a life in accordance with the ideals of God which had been implanted in the mind of Moses.

Read 15:20, 21, the simplest version of the rejoicing which followed the destruction of the Egyptian pursuers. Continue with a rapid reading of verses 22-27; 16:4, 5, 25-30, and chapter 17. Study carefully chapter 18. Notice that the suggestion to organize groups for more efficient government of the people came from Jethro. Does this suggest that Moses' genius was that of inspiration and ethical insight rather than organization?

Moses certainly knew how to inspire his people. Read the uplifting promise of 19:3-6. Admonitions to obedience under the new conditions of the nomad life, and freedom from bondage, demanded definite standards of conduct in conformity with the ideals of God held by Moses. These appear in 20:1-17, and together with the story of their presentation to the people with impressive cere-

monies, 19:7-25. With the volcanic mountain, which was said to be the abode of Jehovah, smoking, rumbling, and quaking, its summit obscured by a heavy cloud, can you conceive of anything more awe-inspiring than this scene, or wonder at its effect upon the people? Verses 18-21.

Following this, 20:20-23:33 is devoted to practical laws applying the Mosaic principles to conditions which existed after the people had settled in Canaan and were engaged in agriculture. Notice the injunction to simplicity in worship, verses 23-26.

In chapter 24 Moses departs into the mountain for further meditation and communion with God. The story continues in chapter 32.<sup>1</sup> Read the vivid description of what transpired in the camp while Moses was upon the mountain, Aaron's dilemma, his way out, Moses' anger, and the interpretation of Jehovah's demand for punishment.

Note 33:1-34:27, which closes the selection from the old histories used by our prophet so far as the book of Exodus is concerned. The story is continued, however, at Numbers 10:20.<sup>2</sup> The following passages in Numbers are interesting reading for those who desire to continue the narrative, 10:29-12:16; 13:17-14:25, 39-45; 20:1-21, and chapter 21.

The very interesting stories of Balaam 22:2-24:25 should be carefully read. Balaam was a professional soothsayer or diviner, who when approached by the people of the east and southeast of the Jordan in the region through which the Hebrews must come to Canaan with a request that he pronounce a curse upon the Israelites, refused to do so. Visualize the scenes in your mind. This is an exceedingly interesting and dramatic example of the religious customs not only of Israel but of the surrounding nations. In the estimation of those who requested it, Balaam's curse would have been effective.

We should now recall our work for the month and decide what religious contribution helpful in modern times we have received. Will you consider the following, and test them by your own experience:

1. A deeply religious purpose which was the occasion of their production pervades the books which we have considered.
2. A knowledge of the history back of the Old Testament books proves to be necessary to their understanding.
3. The books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Judges, and Joshua<sup>3</sup> contain a continuous narrative which has been broken into parts or books by later hands.

<sup>1</sup> The elaborate instructions for the making of an ark and a tabernacle contained in chapters 25-31 seem inconsistent with the simplicity in worship enjoined above. They may be the idealistic production of later years.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 34:29-40:38 continue the older story of chapters 25-31.

<sup>3</sup> A note on Joshua in which there are further sections of these old documents will be given in the next study.



4. The survey of the past helps us, as it helped the Hebrew people, to understand the present, and it forecasts to some extent the future.
5. God is in history working intelligently toward definite ends.
6. God works through men and women as they are—very imperfect and frequently at variance with his will.
7. The men who helped the world most in olden times were those with spiritual vision or insight. Is that the case today?
8. Where spiritual insight clashed with commercial genius or political sagacity it ultimately triumphed. Will it continue to do so?
9. The struggle for social justice is inseparately linked with the idea of God.
10. Great souls in every age commune with God.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did there come to be two Hebrew kingdoms?
2. How did the Hebrew people regard autocracy in the days of Elijah?
3. In the Ahab-Elijah contest, give Ahab's point of view.
4. What was the point of view of the prophets in this crisis?
5. What was the effect of Elijah's triumph upon himself?
6. Did Elijah have a higher ideal of God than simply as controller of the physical forces of life?
7. What relation had religion to politics in Israel?
8. What relation had religion to ideals of social justice?
9. In what way did this crisis lead to the development of literature in Israel?
10. In what books do we find this literature?
11. What major groups of stories are contained in these books?
12. What seems to be the dominant purpose of the world-stories in Genesis I-II?
13. What religious lesson did you get from the prophet's presentation of stories of Abraham?
14. Of Jacob?
15. Of Moses?
16. Does the world need these lessons today?
17. What impressions besides these truths do you think the writer wished his people to receive?
18. Name some religious ideals of these times which Christians have outgrown.
19. What causes changes in religious ideals?
20. If God remains the same, and religious ideas change as we come to know him better, need we fear these changes?
21. Can truth about God be an undesirable possession?

## STUDY III

## HEROES OF THE CONQUEST PERIOD

## JOSHUA AND JUDGES

The two books with which we shall occupy ourselves in the study of this month were prepared at a much later date than the events which they record. Both deal with the conquest of Canaan, one of them—the book of Joshua—seeming to complete the old prophetic documents which we have been following through the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers, by bringing the Hebrews into Palestine with a series of rapid and significant victories, in which Joshua is the chief hero.

The second book, Judges, gives us, however, what seems to be a collection of stories of heroic deeds of other men, representatives of different tribes, who apparently led separate attacks upon the Canaanites in Palestine and had much to do with its conquest.

This group of stories gives one the impression of a very long period of struggle, indeed hundreds of years, before the Hebrews were safely established in Canaan. We shall have more to do with these books when we arrive at the period of Israel's literary history to which they in their present form belong; but since we are interested in the origins of the literature, it will suit our purpose thus to complete our survey of the collections which we have already begun, and to become acquainted with another collection which forms the basis of the book of Judges. By so doing we shall gain a clearer view of the moral and religious ideals current in those early days, and so be able better to appreciate the moral task of later centuries.

In our study of the book of Numbers we left the Hebrew people at the borders of Canaan, camping in Shittim, having conquered the East Jordan territory of the Amorites, the Ammonites, and Bashan (Numbers, chapter 21).

Read now Joshua 2:1–3:1, 5, the story of the spies sent to Jericho, a formidable city west of the Jordan. Note their encouraging report to Joshua, and the fact that the courage and vigor of the Israelites had already impressed themselves upon the citizens of Jericho. The attack upon this city was an exceedingly important enterprise. Its success would mean a foothold in the choicest portion of Canaan.

Under Joshua's leadership the people crossed the Jordan safely, stopped at Gilgal just on the other side, and there took special precautions in order to insure the favor of Jehovah. Read 3:9–4:12, 15–18; 5:2, 3, 8, 9. To the Hebrew people the ark represented all that the flags and banners of modern armies mean today. It was the visible object about which they rallied. As the flag today symbolizes the sovereignty of a people or a ruler, so to the Hebrews the ark sym-

bolized the presence, support, and sovereignty of their God. The ark preceded them into battle. Circumcision was to the Hebrews a religious rite symbolizing the covenant of faithfulness which they had made with Jehovah.

Like many leaders in the world's history, Joshua, in this great crisis, is said to have beheld a vision, which assured him that Jehovah was with him in his enterprise. Read verses 13-15.

Read the story of the taking of Jericho, chapter 6. Remember that these were Homeric centuries, more than 1000 B.C. Israel's literature contains many such stories, in which we see not the literal history of events, but the glorious truth which more than once saved the Israel of later centuries, namely, that from the earliest times the closest relation had existed between the leaders of the Hebrews and their God. To them there was nothing incongruous in the ways in which this relationship was pictured in their traditions.

The superstitious awe of Jehovah, which was so large an element in the attitude of the people toward him in these early days, is wonderfully illustrated in 7:2-26, which should be connected with 6:18, 19.

The story of the capture of Ai follows in 8:1-29. Chap. 9:3-15<sup>a</sup>, 22, 23, 26, 27 contains another picturesque story of the campaign, while another follows in 10:1-27 and 11:1-9. Read also chapter 24 recording the death of Joshua.

We have now read enough of this book to verify the statement in our introduction as to its subject, and to satisfy ourselves that Joshua was indeed a very important figure in the traditions of the people, and that about his name many marvelous stories gathered. It is not strange that these stories idealized the history as well as the hero.

Let us now turn to the book of Judges, which also pictures conditions and events in Israel's early centuries in Canaan. Here we shall find ourselves on more solid ground. This book also has its theology, to which we shall give attention in a later study. Just now we want to discover other heroes of this period and their ideals of conduct.

The book takes its name not from one hero, as did the book of Joshua, but from a group of heroes who were in later times called "judges." The name is in one sense proper, since these men strove to secure justice for Israel among the peoples who were struggling to keep her from rising to power in Canaan. A better name, however, would be "Heroes," for among them were men who from time to time rallied the people to make a stand against their oppressors, for a time securing peace and a chance to develop, as well as men who were conspicuous in a much less desirable way.

We have no certain knowledge of the date of these troubled years, save that it was probably considerably earlier than 1000 B.C.

Chapters 1:1-3:6 of the book of Judges contain a sort of historical summary of the whole period of the Conquest, duplicating parts of Joshua and forecasting a part of the book of Judges itself.

Chapters 3-16 contain the stories of the Heroes in whom we are interested. There were twelve men in the group. They do not represent a succession chronologically, nor one section of the country. They come from independent tribal groups which entered the land at different points and at widely separated times, each settling in that part of the country where he could best gain a region of comparative safety, or where there was some special attraction in climate, soil or other favorable condition.

Of some of these men we have practically no information in the way of early stories. The collector has given us only the name of the tribe from which they came, and the enemy from whom they were successful in delivering the people.

These little-known ones are: Othniel, who defeated the king of Mesopotamia, 9<sup>b</sup> and 10<sup>b</sup>; Ehud, who having assassinated Eglon, king of Moab, who had allied the kings of Ammon and Amalek with him against the Hebrews nearest his territory, having rallied the men of Ephraim and defeated the leaderless Moabites, 3:12-30. Shamgar, who repulsed the Philistines, in a rustic manner, 3:31, is familiarly known by his ox goad; Tola, of whom we have no data except his lineage, location and period of activity, 10:1, 2.

The unique distinction of Jair, so far as we know, was that he had thirty sons who rode on thirty asses' colts (a sign of great distinction), each having a city of his own, 10:3-5; Ibzan also is noted for the possession of thirty sons and thirty daughters, the latter of whom he exchanged for wives for his sons, 12:8-10. Of Elon nothing important is told us 12:11, and of Abdon only that he also was blessed with many sons of distinction, 12:13-15.

About six of these leaders, however, there are stories through which we can discover qualities of character which help us to see in some of them ideals above those common to their times, although they were in other respects thoroughly representative of those times.

In connection with our first study we were introduced to the vital portion of this book of Judges through the story of the prophetess Deborah. Turn to Study I and review chapters 4 and 5, following out again the suggestions there made.

As you review the poem of chapter 5, note the location of the tribes on a map of Canaan as divided among the ten tribes and especially that those which were farthest away were among those that failed to respond to Deborah's call. In other words, remoteness from the center of the difficulty resulted in indifference to the good of the whole. The fertile plain of Esdraelon watered by the river Kishon would be chiefly useful to the tribes nearest, and was a matter of indifference to those farther away. This evidence of lack of unity and of national feeling is characteristic of the times.

Turn now to the epigrammatic summary of conditions in the days of the judges as seen in 21:25. "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes." Let your imagination dwell for a moment upon this

picture of unamalgamated Hebrew tribes, and Canaanitish city folk, with their high places where the Baals of the land were worshiped, their sensuous oriental civilization, with moral standards vastly different from those fostered by the simple life of the Hebrews in the wilderness. The more vividly we picture these conditions, the truer will be the background against which we shall see the characters of those outstanding Hebrews the stories of whom we shall study more closely.

If details of the wild doings of these days are desired, a rapid reading of chapters 17 to 21 will present a stolen fortune which was converted into a graven image, a house of gods, a stolen priest, gross violation of hospitality, barbarous treatment of women, civil war, and wives captured as among savage tribes.

Notwithstanding all this, however, we shall search for idealists and heroes under whose leadership the people were gradually drawing together and working out higher ideals of life and conduct.

Read the story of 6:2—8:28. Let us see if we can paraphrase this story interpreting it in modern terms: 6:1-6, Israel is groaning under the marauding insults of the Midianites and desert people south of Canaan.

6:11-16. Gideon, the son of an able man of the village of Ophrah, in the humiliation of trying to hide from lurking foes while he is threshing a bit of wheat, is overwhelmed by a sense of his own responsibility for the deliverance of his people. He feels his inadequacy, yet he is urged by a feeling that it is the call of God.

6:19-24. He expresses his conviction of God's plan for him by communion with God, which, according to the custom of the time, takes the form of a sacrifice, which leaves him reassured and ready for action.

6:25-32. Believing that in a great cause there must be no divided allegiance, Gideon, with a group of his retainers, in the dark of the night for fear of the villagers, throws down and destroys the ancient village Baal. His father, when called upon to punish his son, remarks in effect, "If Baal is a god, he ought to be able to take care of himself."

6:36-40. Still with doubts lest God should not be with him, Gideon tries to learn by a sign, from which experiment he issues with greater confidence in the presence and power of God.

6:33-35 and 7:1-3. A fresh invasion of the Midianites furnishes the occasion for immediate action. Gideon rises to his task, sends out the call to war, and multitudes from the central and northern portion of the land respond. They are, however, timid folk, unaccustomed to war. Gideon recognizes the inefficiency of such an army and sends crowds of those who are trembling and fearful to their homes.

7:4-8. Convinced that the superior numbers of the Midianites make a battle with them unwise, Gideon, by a clever device, tests the remaining crowd, and



selects three hundred of the most eager warriors, sending all the rest to their homes.

7:9-14. Alone except for a faithful servant, he proceeds to spy out the enemy's camp under the cover of darkness, and in so doing discovers that his warlike preparations have already intimidated the Midianites.

7:15-22. Returning to his little band of picked men, he plans a clever stratagem which will produce the terror of glaring lights and crashing noise, and leads the men stealthily down to the enemy's camp. His plan works; the enemy flees in confusion.

7:23-8:21. A great pursuit follows, in which Gideon is joined by many from the surrounding tribes. The kings of Midian are slain and those of his own tribe who had failed to come to his assistance are severely punished.

8:22-28. Now the idol of the people, Gideon is urged to become their king, an honor which they propose shall descend to his son and to his son's son after him. But to Gideon a kingship is inconsistent with the very freedom for which he has been fighting. Not even for such an honor can he change the ancient order. Jehovah is king in Israel. He asks only that the golden ear rings taken from the enemy be given to him. From them he makes a golden image, which shall be to the people as a memorial of Jehovah's part in the great victory.

This is the plain statement which a modern historian might give, but how tame and inadequate compared with the old story, so picturesque, so vivid, with its dialogue, its primitive religious customs and ideas, its belief in signs and wonders.

Such a paraphrase, however, clarifies the story for us moderns and helps us to see Gideon as he really was, a man ready to take responsibility, no more his than another's, and to dedicate to his task body, brain, and all his young enthusiasm, confident that Jehovah would stand by him in a good cause; and then, when the work was ended, rejecting personal honor and reward, and directing the gratitude of his fellow-countrymen to the God who had upheld him. Such a Gideon has certainly inspiration for us today!

In the story of Abimelech we have one of those family cataclysms which often occurred in those days when to be king was the ambition of every man of power. Briefly, the story recounts how at Gideon's death Abimelech, who was the son of a Shechemite maid-servant of Gideon's, stirred up a conspiracy against the other sons of Gideon, of whom there were many. He secured such a following that he was able to go to Ophrah, the ancestral home of Gideon, and kill, as he supposed, all the sons, and then to get himself proclaimed king.

He soon met with equal treachery in his own city, a half Canaanitish, half Israelitish city, and perished in a miniature civil war. It is worth while to read the story for two reasons: first, because it helps us to see the unstable



conditions of the times and the lack of any standard except that *might made right*; and, second, because of the interesting fable which appears in chapter 9. Glance through this chapter so as to get the drift of events, and then return to verse 3 and note that one son of Gideon was overlooked in the killing because he was in hiding. Read his picturesque protest in the form of a fable, ending in a curse pronounced upon Abimelech, verses 7-20.

Recalling that Gideon had refused to be king and that the Hebrews had had no king, does Jotham's fable voice a protest against the idea of kingship as well as against the grasping ambition of Abimelech who was willing to commit wholesale murder in order to be called king? Do we here see the conservative and sane man as over against the adventurer? Does the fable itself suggest a characteristically oriental way of driving home a disagreeable truth? Do we also see that as yet the idea of king suggested no sense of responsibility but only personal satisfaction? Does Jotham's emphasis upon the fact that the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine were each performing a useful service suggest that in his estimation the ideal of life was service rather than power? Perhaps we are going a great way in this inference considering the times; perhaps not.

The story of Jephthah in chapter 11 is an exceedingly interesting one, for it presents an example of fidelity to a vow which was doubtless very common in Israel. Remember that fear held a very large place in all early religions, and that a broken vow was supposed to bring upon the one who had made it the vengeance of God.

Read 11:1-3 and note that Jephthah was an illegitimate son and on that account despised by his kinsmen to such an extent that they refused to share the family inheritance with him. In the land of Tob, on the northern borders of Gilead, he gathered together a community of his own, where evidently he gained a more than local reputation as a warrior. See verses 4-6.

Picture the scene and study the dialogue of verses 6-10. Does verse 11 suggest that Jephthah's was a powerful personality? Note that the arrangement proposed is not a temporary one "for the period of the war," but permanent headship. What is the significance of the fact that Jephthah's first act is to visit a local shrine?

Study the dialogue in the scene between the messengers of Jephthah and the king of Ammon, verses 12, 13, and Jephthah's answer to the king's message in verses 14-27. Does Jephthah's apparent desire to avoid a battle suggest his wisdom?

Notice that Jephthah cites history to prove his right to fight Ammon. Was he familiar with the facts? Read Num. 21:21-31, the conquest of the Amorites including the Amalekites. Recall the intimidation of the king of Moab by Balaam in Numbers, chapters 22-24. Continue the story of Jephthah in verses

28-33. What is Jephthah's last act, before going into the battle? Are we to infer from the rest of the story that Jephthah's daughter was, after the months of mourning, offered as a burnt-offering? Was this fanaticism on the part of Jephthah or simply the conscientious following out of the religious beliefs of his times? Could Jephthah have expected to prosper as the leader of Gilead if he had brought upon himself and his tribe the curse of God which he believed that a broken vow would bring? Does this incident coupled with the ready response of Jephthah to the call of his people, even after they have disowned him, help us to imagine that Jephthah was even in these early days a "social-minded" man and it was not on his own account alone, but also for the sake of his people, that he faithfully fulfilled his vow? Does the story suggest that for generations after Israel came into Canaan the customs of the land had a great influence upon the beliefs and practices of the Hebrews?

Read verse 39, last phrase, and verse 40. Have we here a clue to the way in which through hundreds of years this story was preserved? The going up of a group of Hebrew maidens every year to the solitude of the mountains for four days was a matter which would be observed, and must be explained, the story thereby remaining fresh and beautiful.

Chapters 13-16 introduce us to another hero whose name is familiar to all. His character has frequently been wrongly estimated. In order to understand the attitude of the Hebrew writers toward Samson we must remember that any unusual phenomenon, such as Samson's great physical strength, was considered a special mark of Jehovah's favor. When, as in his case, that strength was not infrequently the source of annoyance and even disaster to the enemies of Israel (and therefore the enemies of Jehovah) they inferred that on such occasions the spirit of Jehovah was working through Samson. Hence the phrase "and the spirit of Jehovah came upon him." Suppose, therefore, in reading the story we, with our clearer vision of the character of God and his ways of working, do not charge him with inspiring the acts of Samson, and thus leave ourselves free to give to them unprejudiced judgment.

Read chapter 13, an ancient story about the birth of Samson, the important element of which is that even before his birth Samson was committed to the Nazirite vow. The Nazirites were a group of men who took upon themselves peculiar vows of holiness—in this respect something like monks of later times. Verses 4 and 5, as well as other instances in Hebrew literature, suggest the nature of these vows: no wine or strong drink, no approach to anything considered ceremonially unclean, such as something which was dead; no razor—that is, uncut hair and unshaven beard. This vow, although made by his parents, was binding upon Samson according to the custom and religious ideals of his day.

The story, chapter 14, begins when Samson is of marriageable age. All that goes before—his life in the village from babyhood up—we must infer from what

took place after this time. But we can safely think of him as domineering and not infrequently taking advantage of the prestige of his great strength to work his selfish will, and confident as were his fellows that this strength was a sign of Jehovah's approval and associated with his Nazirite vow. Read the story, chapters 15 and 16, which is too interesting to break up by interpolating comment.

Having now read it to the end, let us go back and consider in detail the psychology of events. Samson first went against all the prejudice of his family in desiring to marry a Philistine woman, a daughter of the enemies of Israel who were at that time also their masters, 15:1-3. Accustomed to submit to his will, the parents make the journey to Timnah to conduct the necessary arrangements for securing for a wife the young woman to whom Samson had taken a fancy. On the way down, Samson kills a lion which had the temerity to roar at him. Since he "told not his father nor his mother" he must have been loitering behind instead of respectfully accompanying his parents. In due time the journey is repeated, this time for the wedding festivities. As Samson passed the place where he had killed the lion, his parents well ahead of him, he turns aside to satisfy his curiosity as to what had become of the carcase. Consider the relation of what follows in verse 9 to his vow. Notice that the passage ending in verse 19 suggests that a spirit of revenge upon Philistine men in general was the motive of Samson's method of paying his unwilling obligation. In modern phraseology would Samson have been considered "a good sport"?

Chapter 15 has another episode with a climax of revenge, verses 1-8, and again the same sort of triumph in the incident of verses 9-17.

Chapter 16:1-3 at least suggests that Samson was not troubling himself to keep that portion of his vow referring to the drinking of wine. Although there is no positive mention of that fact, the sort of life which he was leading indicates that selfish indulgence was his program all along, and that it was only his great strength which saved him from disaster.

Verse 20, closing the episode with Delilah, is very suggestive. Samson up to this point seems to have kept one feature of his vow. But he must at times have felt that it was dangerous business to run the risk of losing the favor of Jehovah, and have felt that his great strength depended absolutely upon holding to that one thing. Waking and finding that last bond between himself and Jehovah broken, self-confidence vanishes and before he is able to get himself together he is securely bound with brass by the Philistines.

As time passes, however, experience shows him that he still has strength, and in the last episode of the story we find him as before devoting all the strength that he has to revenge upon the Philistines.

This story does not present an attractive character. But is it not true that although negative in its teaching, it has tremendous power to make us think of

the responsibility of the possession of ability of any kind? Virtue lies not in the possession of power but in the use to which that power is put.

One of the marvels of the Old Testament stories is the fidelity to the facts of the story as they came down to the writers who preserved them for us. Although this story is full of the spirit of personal treachery and revenge, the writer who uses it for the instruction of his people does not change the story materially, but simply interprets it according to his theory that Samson's strength was a manifestation of God in him, and glories in the fact that he was the man who inaugurated a gradually increasing dominance of the Hebrews over the Philistines.

He thus leaves men of later centuries and newer light to see for themselves just the sort of man that Samson was, and to take warning from his example.

We have already in the first pages of this study alluded to chapters 17 and 18, and it is not necessary for us to consider them further, except to note that these chapters explained to the Hebrews of later generations such facts as how it happened that the tribe of Dan was finally located in the north of the country. These are not matters of particular importance to us, although to the Hebrews they seemed of very great importance.

The final verse of the book is the prophet's denunciation of what he disapproves as well as a commendation of what he approves. Let us keep it in mind as our mental picture of all those days of conquest with their elemental passion and ambition, rather than the orderly, systematic sort of life which the book of Joshua presents to us.

Aside from these pictures of outstanding characters, who in their day and generation lived up to their highest ideals, and the folly and consequent disaster to those who did not so live, have we not gathered from the reading of this book the fact that here also we have as in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua, a group of old stories possibly forming a collection made long before the days of the prophet or group of prophets who used these stories for religious teaching? And can we see, therefore, not the work of a single individual but of the men who in some great national or spiritual crisis turned to stories preserved by other men, stories of the past through which they hoped to help the people of their own times to understand God and to live according to their ideal of God?

Do these stories also impress us with the fact that:

1. from the earliest times, among the Hebrews, the thought of God inspired to *action*?

2. that selfishness and self-seeking were effectual barriers to even the primitive understanding of God which was possible in those days, reminding us that the character and effect of the qualities is the same today?

3. that the clearer knowledge of God which has come to us from the teaching of Jesus is of inestimable value not only to individuals but to nations?

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Have you read all the passages suggested in this study?
2. What two books of the Old Testament contain stories of the conquest of the Hebrews?
3. In which of these books do we find the stories which most truly represent the condition of these ancient times?
4. How may we justly regard the man, Joshua?
5. Would it be fair to call the book of Joshua "idealized history"?
6. According to the representation of the book of Judges, what was the manner of the conquest of the land of Canaan?
7. Who were the Judges?
8. Give the facts about Gideon.
9. Describe a man of Gideon's type in modern times.
10. What was the origin of Jotham's fable?
11. What men can you recall from the history of modern nations who were like Abimelech?
12. Describe the character of Jephthah.
13. What similarity had Jephthah's sacrifice to that of a modern father who gave his son to his country in the late war?
14. What is the key to the understanding of the story of Samson?
15. Give a catalogue of Samson's failures.
16. How would you use the story of Samson to help growing boys? young men? older men?
17. How are these stories able to give us light on two periods of Israel's history, that of the conquest, and that of the early prophets, 800 B.C.?
18. Does it enhance or detract from the religious values of these earlier portions of the Old Testament to know that they are the reflections of many centuries of religious thought among the Hebrews, rather than the work of one man?
19. Was God more active in the lives of these man of olden time than he is in our lives today? If so, why?
20. Are there any difficulties which this study has suggested to your mind which you would like to have discussed?



## STUDY IV

### THE BOOKS OF AMOS AND HOSEA

#### THE BOOK OF AMOS

In our work for the present study we take a long step forward. Returning for a moment to the time of Elijah, which has so frequently been our point of vantage, we must pass rapidly over more than a hundred years of history. King Ahab had enlarged the borders of northern Israel, defeated many of her enemies, formed defensive alliances with neighboring states, and died in a battle the purpose of which was to win back the Israelitish city of Ramoth-Gilead which had been captured by Damascus in the days of his father, Omri. Notwithstanding all this he was an autocratic king and his ideals seem to have been colored by those of his Tyrian queen, Jezebel. Since the days of the first king in Israel the prophets, as the religious leaders of Israel, had sought to impress the fact that Jehovah was the real king and he who sat upon the throne was there as the chosen representative of Jehovah. Ahab had persecuted some of these same prophets of Jehovah. He had permitted another god to share the homage which the prophets believed belonged to Jehovah alone. All this the prophets could not endure. They had probably drawn more closely together in spirit through all this period although scattered and persecuted. They may in fact be said at this time to represent a political party as well as a religious faith: the Jehovah party as against the king's adherents.

This condition is clearly shown by later events. Under Jehoram, the son of Ahab, there continued much worship of Baal and a sharp division between the followers of Jehovah alone and those who recognized Baal as a god and identified themselves with the party of the old queen who was still living and powerful.

Political misfortunes came thick and fast during these years, and at last a popular revolution (which had at least the sympathy of the prophets if it was not wholly instigated by them) resulted in the massacre of the king and all his household, the remaining sons of Ahab, the dowager queen Jezebel and even the king of Judah, who was a nephew of Ahab, the guest of the king of Israel at the time. This was the bloodiest revolution Israel ever witnessed. The ghastly story is found in II Kings, chapters 9 and 10.

Jehu, the man who led the revolution, seized the throne and succeeded, as the instrument of the prophets, in ridding Israel of the Phoenician Baal worship. But in doing that Jehu had greatly weakened his nation by killing off many of its great



military leaders. So during his reign Syria became more aggressive and in the succeeding reign of his son, Jehoahaz, the city of Samaria itself was besieged and the Syrian king "left not to Jehoahaz save fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen for the king of Syria destroyed them and made them like the dust in threshing." Read the story in II Kings, chapter 13.

Gradually, however, during the next half-century the territory which had been taken away was regained and about 760 B.C. there was upon the throne of Israel a strong king whose reign of forty years is given scant attention in the story in II Kings 14:23-29. The brief account of Scripture is supplemented by inscriptions on the monumental records of Assyria. From these we learn that Assyria, lying far to the northeast but a power whose ambition was world-dominion, was gradually gaining ascendancy over the smaller countries toward the Mediterranean of which Israel was but one. Jehu himself had paid tribute to this great power whose path to the conquest of Egypt lay through Israel and Judah, and to whose ultimate success such important cities as Damascus and the Palestinian capitals must either contribute or perish.

In the days of Jeroboam II (781-740 B.C.) whose reign serves as a setting for the present study, Assyria's power had chiefly served to humiliate Damascus, the most powerful enemy of Israel, and was not generally regarded as a menace to Israel herself. In fact, just at this time Assyria was very weak and did not recover until Tiglath-Pileser III took the throne of Assyria in 745 B.C. Jeroboam's long reign was peaceful. Lost territory was regained and the kingdom of Israel toward the north was greater in extent than at any time since the days of David.

Commercial prosperity followed in the wake of fancied political security. Sharply defined class distinctions based on individual wealth such as was unknown in earlier days developed rapidly. Luxury and self-indulgence began its work of enervating and undermining moral character. The poor, at the mercy of the rich, became poorer. Courts of justice were perverted. Religion, such as it was, flourished on a grand scale. The unwonted prosperity was attributed directly to Jehovah's satisfaction in his people, who thought to repay him with a joyous, extravagant celebration of his favor, at great sanctuaries where sumptuous altars were erected, frequently by the very money which had been unjustly exacted from the poor. These festivities were scenes of feasting and dancing, drunkenness and revelry, combined with sacrifice and ceremonies, similar to those of the greater nations whose commerce was enriching the people. They represented the natural response of the unthinking multitudes.

Left to herself Israel would soon have become but a little arm of Assyria, and the religion of Jehovah indistinguishable from that of the gods of surrounding nations. But to this happy, unthinking Israel came the warning which marks for us a new development in the literature of the Hebrews: the rise of religious leaders who wrote, not as did the compilers in earlier days, but in the vigor of

original contributions of great new doctrines, representing Jehovah in the guise of higher ethical idealism than any of their predecessors had done. Let us turn to the book which bears the name of one of these leaders, Amos. The very first verse of his book tells us that he was a herdsman of Tekoa (a somewhat barren plain southeast of Jerusalem). Note also that his book is dated in the days of Jeroboam II.

Let us gather from the book some of the facts already suggested as to conditions in northern Israel at this time. Read 3:12b, 15; 5:11b; 6:4-6, and note the indications of the luxurious living of the rich.

Read the prophet's judgment as to how these luxuries were gained, and by what sort of conduct they were accompanied, 2:6-8; 3:9,10; 4:1; 5:7,10-12; 8:4-6.

Do you imagine that Amos alone realized the rottenness that underlay the social structure of northern Israel? Certainly the poor felt it, and took no satisfaction in the prosperity of the land. Doubtless there were others whom freedom from anxiety had not blinded to the great political movements of the day and the danger to Israel that lay in them, especially in the world-ambitions of Assyria.

Of the great sanctuaries at which the people carried on their extravagant worship, Bethel was the king's special sanctuary. It was an ancient religious center. Here in the days of the first Jeroboam, at the time of the division of the kingdom, were set up the golden calves, symbolizing the presence of Jehovah. It was one of the old centers at which a group of the prophets lived in the days of Elisha. Here, if anywhere in northern Israel, should religion have been at its best. What does the prophet Amos think of the religious manifestations there? Read 4:4, 5. Is not this a stinging satire upon the worship at this royal sanctuary, where the king and all his court went for religious celebrations three times each year? Note also 5:21-23, 25, 26.

Suppose that we pay a brief visit to the home of Amos and try to discover what in his life helped him to see so clearly the aims and conduct of the people and to dare to hold them up to scorn.

Amos lived in the open country, surrounded by great spaces and the quietness which lends itself to thought. Yet he was but a few miles from Jerusalem, the chief city of the southern kingdom, and only a day's journey farther on were the centers of activity in the northern kingdom. Note 7:14c which suggests that he roamed about with his herds and flocks, and that he harvested the small, sour figs from the sycamore trees, which were ground into flour and used for bread. To him the barren wastes over which he roamed for pasture for his flocks, the sudden storms, the fierce lightning, the distant rock-bound hills, the multitudes of stars, the unchanging return of the seasons, spoke of a God who was infinitely powerful, and at the same time infinitely law-abiding and just. He saw a world in which

portents of coming events in nature were systematically fulfilled. He was impressed by the grandeur, the justice, the righteousness of God. His predecessors had thought of Jehovah as having an interest only in Israel among all the nations, but he saw God as holding all the nations of the earth responsible for their deeds. He could but conclude that a just God with unlimited power seeing injustice even in his own people must punish it.

Neither was Amos blind to the signs of the times in politics. Moral rottenness was no foundation for political strength. Israel's geographical position was one which made her the desire of larger nations, to the northeast, and to the southwest. Other nations had perished whose offenses seemed not so grave to Amos as those of Israel. Amos believed that Jehovah himself had dealt with these other nations. What would be Jehovah's attitude toward his own people who, with ample opportunity to know his will, had ignored his messages of instruction and warning? This was the question that confronted Amos. The stern principles on which he solved it are clearly seen in his book.

Now let us imagine ourselves at the great shrine in Bethel, on the occasion of one of the annual religious festivals. The king and many of his courtiers are there. The great high priest of the sanctuary is in his glory. It is his day of greatness. In another part of the busy little city a crowd is gathering around a plain countryman. It is Amos. He has been many times before in Bethel selling his sheep at the festival times. He is speaking. Read what he says in 1:3-5. Note that he gives his speech extraordinary importance by using the prophetic "Thus saith Jehovah." He is denouncing Israel's old enemy Damascus and predicting her complete destruction by Jehovah as retribution for her sins. Verses 6-8 deal with Philistia, and so on stanza by stanza (for the form is that of a funeral dirge) he pronounces the doom of each of the countries surrounding Israel, until in 2:6-9 he turns upon Israel herself. Imagine the satisfaction of the growing crowd turning to consternation at this unexpected climax. Notice that in each of these cases the nation is held responsible for plain sins of inhumanity, and that Israel is told that her sins of social injustice are to bring destruction upon her at the hand of her just God. Against their confidence in Jehovah's protecting care Amos hurls his charge of even greater responsibility because of superior advantage. What is it that is to destroy them? Verses 13-16 clearly picture devastation by war and conquest.

Is Amos thinking of Assyria or of Egypt, or of a vigorous rival of Assyria, Varta, a region to the northwest of Assyria? Does this arraignment show the breadth of his observation of other nations than Israel? Would such an address go unchallenged by the infuriated crowd? We may imagine Amos with still greater boldness drawing near to the sanctuary itself. Read 7:1-3, 4-6, 7-9, three brief statements which he clothes in the form of vision, the last directly aimed at the sanctuary and at the reigning house of Jeroboam.

Amaziah, the High Priest, appealed to the king. Perhaps voicing the king's contemptuous answer in this season of mirth and joy and apparent security, Amaziah turns to Amos. Read verses 10-13.

Amos' retort in verses 14-18 plainly indicates that though not of the professional guild of the prophets, he considers his message God-given, and neither king nor high priest can intimidate him or cause him to modify it, but he doubtless disappeared from Bethel.

It is impossible for us to know just how much of the Book of Amos was actually spoken at Bethel and how much was written in his Tekoan home, and passed in that form from hand to hand. But the background of Bethel seems very appropriate for chapters 3-7.

Read 3:9-12; 4:1-3, and note how the punishment which is to come is directly connected with sins of greed and oppression. Read 4:6-11, which enumerates past national misfortunes which Amos interprets as repeated warnings from Jehovah.

The traditional faith of the people in the safety of the sanctuaries is not upheld by Amos. Notice 3:14; 5:4-6. Read 6:1-8, 14. No riches can save from the coming disaster. Verse 14 shows clearly that Amos is thinking of an invasion. 8:1-9:10 paints still darker pictures.

Has Amos no remedy for the situation? Yes, but it was one that he knew Israel would not accept. Nevertheless he phrases it with wonderful beauty, 5:4, 14, 15, 24. (The passage 9:11-15 is so radically different in spirit and form from the rest of the book that it is supposed to have been added by a later writer who could not be reconciled to Amos' doctrine of drastic punishment.)

One should not look for continuity in this book. It is fragmentary. Should you wish to read it through continuously, read section by section, keeping always in mind the purpose of the prophet, to warn his people and if possible to change their attitude and conduct.

What contribution did Amos make to the religious thinking of his own times? Whereas his people had thought of Jehovah as a God whose favor could be bought by sacrifices and gifts and joyous festivals; Amos says that without righteous conduct these are an abomination to Jehovah. The people had thought of Jehovah's interest in conduct only as related to himself; Amos says that his chief interest lies in the conduct of man toward his fellow-men.

Increasing prosperity had led to ambition for great individual wealth, and lack of high ideals as to the method by which it might be secured. Amos says that ill-gotten wealth will be taken away, and that the just and the unjust shall perish alike as a result of the universal disregard of the rights of the poor.

The popular ideal of worship could be carried out without sincerity or a desire to increase one's knowledge of Jehovah and his will. Amos said obedience and sincerity alone render worship acceptable.

These seem self-evident principles, viewing them as we do from a distance of three thousand years and in the light of the teaching of Jesus; but to the people

of Amos' day they were new and staggering truths which few could understand or appreciate. Amos, in setting them forth as we have clearly seen, was taking his life in his hands.

How about the interpretation of these teachings of Amos in modern times?

1. Does he see that there are laws of cause and effect in human history as inflexible as in nature, and for the same reason that God is back of both?
2. That there is but one way of escape from the disasters that follow social injustice, and that is by establishing social justice?
3. That there can be no real satisfaction to God or man in worship which is not accompanied by a sincere desire to understand God and to obey his will in our relations with our fellow-men?
4. That too great prosperity frequently renders people blind to the obligations which their superior advantages entail?

### THE BOOK OF HOSEA

The Book of Hosea, parts of which come to us from approximately the same period as that of Amos, is not nearly so easily understood. The great message of the book is needed as a connecting link between the severity of Amos and the hope through which later Hebrew prophets were able to hold a remnant of the people to their faith in Jehovah. That hope according to Hosea has its basis in the character of God. Yet the book is so saturated with despair that Hosea himself scarcely sees the far-reaching effect of his insight into the nature of Jehovah's attitude toward his people. Like Amos, Hosea gained his new knowledge of God through experience. With Amos it was the experience and observation of a man supremely interested in the power and justice of God as manifested in nature and the history of nations. Hosea's experience was deeply personal as we shall see when we come to examine his book.

Hosea lived in northern Israel during a portion of the reign of Jeroboam II and was thus far contemporary with Amos, but it seems quite certain that he saw the political and social chaos which followed the death of Jeroboam.

Read the brief account in II Kings 15:8-25 noting that the son of Jeroboam II, Zechariah, was assassinated after six months on the throne. The usurper Shallum reigned but one month, being slain by another aspirant to the throne who reigned ten years, during which the kingdom paid heavy tribute to Assyria, secured by taxation. His son Remaliah reigned but two years when a conspirator in his army killed him and seized the throne, reigning twenty years, at the end of which time a great part of northern Israel was in the hands of Assyria, and multitudes of the inhabitants had been carried away to that land.

It is not necessary to continue the disastrous chronicle. We can easily see that any prophet of Jehovah living in northern Israel during this period as one of



its own people, loving his country, might well despair. Although the story in Kings gives only political details we can picture to ourselves the social conditions which would naturally accompany such rapid political decline. From the Book of Hosea we gain vivid impressions of this social and religious chaos.

We must expect to find the reading of this book difficult because the text has suffered many changes. Some are due to the loss of portions, some to mistakes of scribes, and others because comments, explanations, and later additions by those who have found the book of absorbing interest, have found their way into the text itself. On account of this imperfect text, and also because of the turbulency of the author's thought there are many abrupt transitions which would in themselves render the book hard reading.

Let us from the book itself discover, if we can, the sort of people and the kind of life by which Hosea was surrounded. Read 4:1, 2 picturing the utter lack of moral standards, not even the most obvious social laws being observed. 4:6-10 suggests that the prevailing ignorance of the way of Jehovah is due to the fact that the priests, the natural teachers of the people, are mercenary, give no leadership, and fatten on the sins of the people. The great sanctuaries, with their debauching rites and their images, have degenerated into places of sheer idolatry. People are now actually worshiping the "stocks" which they themselves have made and set up, ostensibly as memorials to Jehovah, and with all the immoral rites which characterized foreign nations in the worship of their gods. See also 6:9; 8:4b-6. The political leaders are no better, 7:3, 5, 7; 8:4a. The country turns foolishly from one great nation to another for succor.

Hosea had indeed much food for thought. But had it not been for an experience in his own life he might not have seen in Israel's God more than the stern realities which his contemporary and predecessor Amos had proclaimed.

From a somewhat confused account in chapter 1, possibly related by some other than the prophet, we learn that Hosea married a woman named Gomer, v. 3. Hosea's first child is given a prophetic name, Jezreel, the name of the plain upon which Jehu's atrocities were committed a few years before, suggesting that already Hosea was speaking his disapproval in the name of Jehovah, and the determination of Jehovah to punish Israel, v. 5. When the second child is born, conditions are still worse, v. 6, and the name of the third child suggests absolute separation of Jehovah from Israel.

There seems to be a very close relation between Hosea's family life and his understanding of the attitude of God toward Israel, and we find the clue in v. 2. Hosea's wife is unfaithful to him, her children belong to strangers, and the whole experience seems to the writer to typify the relation of Israel with Jehovah. Hosea's early reaction is found in 2:4-7.

Hosea himself continues the story in 3:1-3 suggesting that with love still deep and strong he followed after his erring wife and brought her back out of the slavery

into which she had fallen. He placed her under the protection of seclusion until she should again be worthy of restoration to his home as wife and mother.<sup>1</sup>

How the experiment ended we do not know. The story which has been gathered from these scanty evidences appears in the book of Hosea because he can in no other way convince his people of the truth of the great message which he has for them. It is as if he said, "I know that what I am saying to you is true; it is like the experience through which Jehovah has called me his prophet to pass in order that I may speak to you."

What was the content of this message? Note that the prophet continually describes the condition of the nation as one of idolatry, abandonment of Jehovah. That is, she is to Jehovah what his wife had been in her relation to himself. Read Hosea 2:10-14, in which he transfers his life-experience to Israel, who already finds herself deserted by her lovers, yet still sought by Jehovah, yes, and yet to be betrothed to him in righteousness, and in justice, and in loving kindness, and in mercy. All these are characteristics, the very opposite of those which Hosea saw in the people all about him. They express the yearning of his heart rather than the conviction of his faith. For the prophet despairs of any change. Read 4:17-19. Not even the priests can lead the people back to Jehovah for they are blind shepherds, 5:1-7. There is no leadership among the princes, for they have spurned Jehovah. They have been content to follow the council of men, and have not turned to Jehovah, their true leader. They have even gone to Assyria, their greatest enemy for help.

What is the inevitable result? Jehovah will punish, and will hide himself from the nation until they truly repent, and seek him earnestly, verses 14, 15.

Chapter 6 pictures the people in a sudden burst of enthusiasm for Jehovah returning to his worship with confidence that their sacrifices will secure his favor, verses 4-10. This passage reminds us of Amos with his plea for goodness and not sacrifice. The prophet turns from this false religious zeal to the conditions of life around him, reciting instances of the most horrible sins, probably fresh in his mind at the time. Chapter 7 is an arraignment of all the social and political sins of which one can imagine the nation to have been guilty, ending in 8:3 with the judgment of Jehovah. A similar passage follows in 8:4-7.

Read 9:1-9, and note in verses 7, 8, the response to the prophet which suggests that the people had no regard for Hosea's message, even actually opposing him. In 9:10-17 we have a wild lament. Read 10:1, 2, 5-7 an arraignment directed at the sanctuaries, with a stern warning, "Only seeking Jehovah in righteousness can save." The worship of the calves at Bethel has brought only ruin, verses 11, 14a, 15.

In 11:1-4 the prophet portrays the patient love of Jehovah as a father for his child. Verses 5-11 pronounce the doom of exile, but the reluctance of Jehovah

<sup>1</sup>There are other theories of the experience of the prophet which may be as soundly based as this, but they do not alter the message of his book.

to execute the punishment. Read the continued lament in 13:9-11. There is now no hope, for, v. 4, there is no savior but Jehovah, and from him they have utterly departed. In 13:12-16 Israel is utterly condemned to Sheol, which is interpreted by war and captivity.

Terrible as is the indictment of Hosea, as one reads he cannot escape the conviction that he was delivering a message that to him was a heartrending one. The agony of Jehovah over the conduct of his people has had its counterpart in the agony of the prophet over his unfaithful wife, and it has taken hold of the soul of the prophet. Back of the anathemas which he hurls at the people we sense the longing for their return, and the conviction that a repentant and teachable people would be met by a loving and forgiving God. It is upon this foundation stone that the religion of Israel took one more step toward light and life.

Chapter 14 of the Book of Hosea has been added by a later hand but it follows to a logical conclusion Hosea's thought of a loving and long-suffering God.

Perhaps it will be sufficient for our purpose to recall this book as one which clearly teaches that we have other means of knowing God than the Bible or even our human teachers. In our own deepest life-experiences he reveals himself to us.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Have you read all of the passages suggested in this study?
2. Approximately in what years and under what king was Israel when Amos spoke his message?
3. Describe the political situation of Israel at that time.
4. What was the general attitude toward Jehovah?
5. How was this attitude expressed?
6. Name one or more of the great sanctuaries.
7. What were the prevailing social conditions?
8. Give the political aspects of Amos' message.
9. Give the social aspects of Amos' message.
10. Define true religion as he conceived it.
11. Who was Hosea, and when did he live?
12. What life-experience contributed to his knowledge of God?
13. How had political conditions changed since Amos spoke at Bethel?
14. Describe the social chaos, giving references.
15. What was the attitude of religious and social leaders, priests, and princes?
16. What was Hosea's new thought of Jehovah?
17. How does he apply it to Israel?
18. Give some reasons why his message was unheeded.
19. What may we today learn from the message of Amos?
20. From what source does Hosea teach us to expect knowledge of God?

## STUDY V

### THE FIRST ISAIAH AND MICAH

#### THE FIRST ISAIAH

It will be helpful to us at this time to have a chronological table by which we can check our dates, and note particularly the growing power of Assyria over the Palestinian states. Only so much of the chronology follows as will cover the period of our present study.

B.C.

- 745-727 Tiglath-Pileser IV, king of Assyria.
- 743-740 Assyrian campaigns against Arpad, in Syria.
- 738 Assyrian campaign against Hamath, in Syria.
- 735-715 Ahaz, king of Judah.
- 735 Alliance of Northern Israel and Syria against Judah. Ahaz appeals to Tiglath-Pileser, thus becoming a vassal of Assyria and subject to tribute.
- 734 Tiglath-Pileser destroys Damascus, invades Northern Israel, and deports large numbers of the inhabitants. Hoshea becomes king of Israel as a vassal of Assyria.
- 727-722 Shalmaneser IV, king of Assyria.
- 725 Rebellion of Syria and Israel against Assyria.
- 724-721 Siege of Samaria; its capture by Sargon. End of Northern Israel.
- 721-705 Sargon, king of Assyria.
- 720 Sargon captures Hamath, in Syria.
- 720-710 Merodach-baladan, king in Babylon, a province of Assyria, becomes hostile to Assyria.
- 715-688 Hezekiah, king of Judah.

This table shows us clearly that in Northern Israel the chaotic conditions which existed in Israel in the days of Hosea did not diminish, and that the threatened destructive approach of Assyria was but a few years in coming.

The prophet whose work we shall study in this period served his God and his people through a period of fifty years or more. We find him closely associated with the court of King Ahaz as early as 735 B.C., and still more active during the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 B.C. He probably perished under Manasseh some time after 688 B.C. The book which bears his name—Isaiah—falls into two very sharp divisions in our present Bible: chapters 1-39 and 40-66. The background of the first division is clearly the period suggested. That of the second is quite as clearly a century or more later in the land of Babylonia, among the captive Hebrews. Possibly there were two men called Isaiah whose sermons were put

together, or it may be that for some other reason which we cannot now discover the work of two prophets was combined in one book. They must, of course, be studied separately and in their true historical connection.

The speeches of Isaiah, as found in chapters 1-39, are not arranged chronologically. Each was called forth by special circumstances, and we must decide from the study of the speech itself just where it belongs, bearing in mind that we have a very small proportion of the many speeches and written messages that Isaiah must have given to his people during that long period.

Isaiah himself tells how he came to be a prophet, and when and where there came to him an overwhelming sense of his call. Read Isa. 6:1-13, noting (1) the date and the circumstances; (2) the details of the vision; (3) its effect upon him and his surroundings; (4) the sense of purification of the prophet through the angelic touch upon his lips; (5) the triple commission; (6) the discouraging outlook. No doubt this story, told long after the occurrence, reflects the thought of the prophet after years of unsuccessful effort to change the life of the people, years in which his youthful enthusiasm was transformed to stern and uncompromising determination to fulfil his seemingly hopeless task.

Referring to our table, note that when Ahaz (the grandson of Uzziah, the king who was a leper) came to the throne, the two kingdoms—Israel, with its capital at Samaria, and Syria, with its capital at Damascus—were making an alliance against Judah. Why was this? In all probability they were urging upon Ahaz a triple alliance, Syria, Israel, and Judah, against their common enemy Assyria, to whom the two northern states had long been paying tribute. Ahaz in terror appealed to the king of Assyria himself for his protection, and of course in doing so became his vassal.

Although Ahaz had inherited from his father and his grandfather a kingdom which was strong and well protected after fifty years of rising prosperity, the fact must not be overlooked that his grandfather had been obliged to endure an invasion by Northern Israel, which had destroyed some portions of the wall of Jerusalem, and in which valuable booty had been carried away from the temple and the city. Although the defensive resources of Ahaz were much greater, there seemed to him good cause to fear an invasion.

Just here it is a good plan for us to discover what were the social and religious ideals of the people, for in them we usually find the roots of the prophet's points of attack, for we must remember that although the prophets were necessarily deeply concerned with politics, they were primarily religious reformers. A realization of these conditions may be gathered from chapters 2-4, which may or may not have been a complete sermon, but which present many aspects of Isaiah's wonderful style and effective method. Let us imagine the prophet coming before the people at some great assembly or function, and speaking the wonderful idealistic words of verses 2-4, a picture of Jerusalem at peace, at once the center and



source of the interest of the whole world. But this is only that he may, with greater force, depict the conditions which at that time prevailed: the people of Judah, forsaken by Jehovah because they have looked to other nations and to wealth and military equipment rather than to Jehovah for their strength, vs. 6, 7, and are placing their dependence upon idols of silver and gold, 8, 20; consulting enchanters and wizards, 3:3. The political leaders and the rich are oppressing the poor, 3:14, 15; the women are extravagant and luxury-loving, 3:16, 18-23. Re-read the whole section, noting how the prophet regards all this. His feeling is so intense that he expresses his conviction of what is coming as if it had already come, using the present tense throughout. A terror is coming so great that none may stand before it. The useless idols will be cast away and rocks and caves will fail to protect from the foe, ch. 2. No princes nor powers can save from the hunger and desolation which will be the just reward of their deeds. The men will be killed, the women forsaken, ch. 3.

Whether this terrible arraignment was made after the accession of Ahaz we do not know, but at all events it serves to suggest that Isaiah saw in the religious and social conditions of his day sufficient cause for great alarm, and that the foe which he had in mind was a greater one than either of the two northern states which threatened Judah, even Assyria itself.

It was to a situation like this that the appeal for a defensive alliance against Assyria seems to have come to Ahaz. As Isaiah, evidently closely associated with the court and a citizen of great prominence, saw only disaster in foreign alliances of any sort, involving as they did the recognition of the gods of the nations with which alliances were made, he proclaimed them a prolific source of idolatry and humiliation to Jehovah who was, Isaiah believed, amply able to preserve his people at all times. Read 7:2 and notice how the hearts of Ahaz and his people were stricken with terror at the possibility of this invasion of Syria and Northern Israel. Read vs. 3-9, which relate how the prophet Isaiah went to meet Ahaz and spoke to him words of counsel and comfort, the substance of which was: Have no fears of these two northern nations, Ahaz; they are worn out like tails of smoking firebrands. Their leaders are powerless. The cities of Samaria and Damascus are soon to perish.

It is quite possible, however, that Ahaz had already made his appeal to Assyria, and that the prophet did not know that fact and Ahaz feared to tell him. Read vs. 10-25, apparently another instance when Isaiah appeared before Ahaz, this time when there were others present, perhaps the assembled court. Isaiah sternly requests Ahaz to ask of him any sign that he wishes that Jehovah may testify to the truth of his prophet's statements, vs. 10, 11 but Ahaz, perhaps *fearing* to ask for a sign, refuses, v. 12. Isaiah retorts in anger that Jehovah will give him a sign whether he wishes it or not. A child soon to be born shall not be old enough to know the difference between good and evil before the two lands, the threats of

which are filling Ahaz with fear, shall be forsaken, 13-17. They shall be devastated by the king of Assyria, and if Ahaz joins himself with these two kings his own land shall share their fate. The name of the child, Immanuel (God with us), will bring terror rather than comfort, for Jehovah's hand will be in this desolation. A young cow and two sheep will give an abundance of milk for the few inhabitants who will remain, vs. 21, 22. Vineyards will be replaced by fields where one will hunt with bows and arrows, and the oxen and sheep which are left will roam among briars and thorns instead of in well-kept pastures, vs. 23-25. Evidently the prophet was unsuccessful, and doubtless before long if not already he knew that Ahaz had taken the step which bound him as a vassal to Assyria.

Notice in 7:3 that Isaiah had called his son Shear-jashub, which means "a remnant shall return"—only a remnant. Wherever this son appeared, the thought of the nation reduced to a remnant would be present. Chapter 8 gives us another instance of these significant names which Isaiah bestowed upon his children. Read 8:1-3. Notice that the prophet prepared a great tablet and placed upon it the words  *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*, and that these words he combined into a name for his son, v. 3. The meaning of these words is "the spoil speedeth, the prey hasteth." Consider how, as the prophet walked about the streets of the city with this child, calling him by name, people would again be reminded of coming disaster. Read v. 4, and notice that the prophet now places the destruction of Damascus and Samaria in the very near future, for he expects it before this son is able to cry, "My father, and my mother."

In 8:5-10:4, which should be continued by 5:25-30, we have a poem, the refrain of which is, "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." You will find this recurring refrain in 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4; 5:25.

Read this long passage carefully, noting that Isaiah pictures the coming of the king of Assyria against the two northern nations as a great flood which will flow over them and on into Judah, 8: 5-8. No counsel which they will seek will avail to save them from the coming disaster for which the prophet and his disciples will wait in silence, further speech being useless, verses 9-20. When at last the people will in despair turn their faces Godward all will be darkness, 21, 22.

There follows a wonderful passage in 9:1-7, which breaks the thought completely, a wonderful vision of the future. There are those who believe that this is the work of a later prophet. If it is the thought of Isaiah it is again a marvelously poetic and beautiful picture of peace such as was presented in chapter 2.

Continuing with 9:8-10:4, we find the prophet representing Jehovah in anger cutting off all way of escape from the wrath which is to come, in which the land will utterly perish because of its own sins. 5: 25-30, presents a picture of Jehovah holding up a signal to the nations to come with all their weapons of war to devour his people as a lion devours its prey, a destruction from which he will give no deliverance.

What were the actual facts of history during this period? In 734 B.C. Northern Israel was invaded by Tiglath-Pileser, the king of Assyria, and a weak vassal was placed on the throne in Samaria. In 732 Damascus was taken. Read II Kings 16:7-9, which suggests the price which Judah paid for a safety which made her at the same time a vassal of Assyria. Note also verse 10, which tells of a friendly meeting of Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser at Damascus, where an interchange of courtesies took place.

At the death of Tiglath-Pileser in 727 B.C., Northern Israel again proved rebellious by withholding the tribute from the new king of Assyria, Shalmanezzer IV. His armies were not long in laying siege and after three years Samaria surrendered in 721 B.C., starving and exhausted. Shalmanezzer had in the meantime died, but his general and successor, Sargon, proved as formidable a foe, and it was by him that the city was taken. Practically the entire population was deported to Assyria and replaced by vassal peoples, fruits of other conquests of the Assyrian kings. Henceforth Judah lay open to the conqueror whenever he should choose to manifest his displeasure.

The next ten years of Isaiah's life were silent years so far as our records are concerned, but we feel sure that they were not so in reality. No doubt he was reiterating his claim that the disasters of the northern countries were the manifestation of the anger of Jehovah and that the Assyrian was his chosen instrument for carrying out this punishment. (See chap. 17.)

In 711, however, there seems to have been another attempt at concerted rebellion, this time headed by the states of Philistia which lay between Judah and Egypt. Such a coalition would naturally mean that these southern states were counting upon the aid of Egypt against her old-time enemy, Assyria. Isaiah had no sympathy with this new project. It was but another phase of the turning of the people away from Jehovah for protection, and Isaiah believed that the power of Jehovah was sufficient to save. It was at this time that we find Isaiah again resorting to some sign which appealed to the eye. Read chapter 20, which relates how the Philistine city of Ashdod was taken, and Isaiah, taking advantage of the terror which this would naturally bring to Jerusalem which was but a few miles away, in the garb of a captive walked the streets of the city. We can imagine the wonder with which people would regard him and how, when questioned, he would explain that this was his message from Jehovah, or would give them some such speech as that in 31:1-3. Of course he meant them to understand that in like garb the inhabitants of Jerusalem would be led away captive if they depended upon Egypt for succor. Perhaps chs. 17-19 belong to this period of the prophet's activity, and also chs. 30, 31.

Again there were ten years of silence. Sennacherib, the son of Sargon, now king of Assyria, was a great soldier. The cities of Palestine had so frequently proved themselves troublesome that he was not long King before he made a western

campaign, subduing Phoenicia on the north of Israel and Philistia on the southwest, necessarily passing through Israelitish country. There is an old Assyrian inscription which relates that forty-six of the fortified cities of Judah fell into the hands of the Assyrians at this time. Ahaz was now dead, and Hezekiah, his son, had been four years upon the throne when Samaria fell. In the ten years which had elapsed since that great disaster his had been a righteous reign. Read II Kings 18:1-16 and notice that Sennacherib apparently turned upon Jerusalem after his other conquests, and at a terrible price Hezekiah bought a temporary peace. The experiences of the past, however, made it impossible for an Assyrian king to have confidence in a Palestinian ruler, and it was not long before Sennacherib determined to lay siege to the city of Jerusalem and his armies appeared before the city. What did Isaiah think in this crisis of 701 B.C.? Read Isa. 1:2-26, imagining the people in their despair rushing to the temple courts with multitudinous sacrifices and great fasts and sacred feasts. Isaiah turned in disgust from all of these demonstrations in the temple, and implored the people to approach Jehovah with clean hands, with justice and mercy, righteous conduct, and sincere worship. These alone, he assured them, could purchase the favor of Jehovah.

Read the story in Isaiah, ch. 36, expressing the scorn of the officers of the Assyrian army for Jerusalem now in the midst of the siege. They even claimed that Jehovah had sent them against the land to destroy it, v. 10, and did everything in their power to weaken the courage and loyalty of the soldiers upon the walls of the city. Ch. 37 tells us how the king sent a messenger to the prophet Isaiah asking his advice, and the response is found in vs. 6, 7. Apparently affairs at home in Assyria caused the temporary abatement of the siege, but a letter soon came to Hezekiah which was a final warning. Read vs. 10-13. Hezekiah took the letter, vs. 14-20, into the temple and presented it in prayer to Jehovah. His answer came through Isaiah. See vs. 21-29. Notice that this word of Jehovah is presented as if addressed to the Assyrian army which was now before the gates of the city demanding its surrender. Isaiah maintained that all that Assyria had done had been with the permission of Jehovah, and that the time had now come when its limit had been reached, and this haughty conqueror was about to be returned to his own country with a "hook in his nose and a bridle in his lips," the captive of Jehovah. It is not likely that this was the first time that Isaiah had spoken strong words like this. Read 10:5-34, where we have something very similar. No doubt all through the siege Isaiah had been going about the streets of Jerusalem encouraging the people and arraigning the Assyrians. 10:5-10, represents the arrogance of Assyria in claiming that her conquests were made in her own power while she asserts her ability to conquer Jerusalem. Vs. 13, 14 are similar, and v. 12 is the explanation and the warning. Vs. 15-19 promise the destruction of the Assyrian power, and vs. 20-23 the



future faithfulness of the people of Israel, led by the remnant that shall survive this invasion. Vs. 24-27 are still more comforting. With what dramatic power the prophet pictures the oncoming of the enemy in vs. 28-32, only to be shorn of its strength by Jehovah as a forest is laid low, vs. 33-34. Read also ch. 28.

There were doubtless many in Jerusalem who had no confidence in Isaiah's messages, but read 37:30-32, in which he promises that within three years they will be sowing, reaping, planting vineyards, and eating the fruit thereof as before the siege, that is, that the agricultural country all about Jerusalem would be restored to normal conditions. Vs. 33-35 are still more specific: "The king of Assyria shall not even shoot an arrow within the city."

No prophet ever saw his own words more completely fulfilled than Isaiah. Secular history tells us nothing of the result of this expedition of Sennacherib. That it was disastrous there is no doubt, as disastrous military results were never recorded by the Assyrian monarchs. Herodotus alludes to this siege and makes the naïve statement that the "bowstrings of the Assyrians were nibbled by mice." The biblical account is exceedingly dignified. Read it in vs. 36, 37. No one knows what terrible visitation killed many of the Assyrians and sent the remainder back to their homeland. Palestine was, so far as we know, never revisited by this particular Assyrian king. Perhaps a pestilence swept through the army, killing many and terrifying the remainder, even leading them to believe that Jehovah, the god of the Hebrews, was able to protect his country.

We can easily picture the joy in the city of Jerusalem on the day following the departure of the Assyrian army, and we can believe that for a period of time Isaiah enjoyed the confidence and the admiration of the people and that there was a great revival of interest in Jehovah and his worship. It is interesting to read in this connection such psalms as 46 and 48, which may easily have originated in some such crisis as this.

There are other fragments from Isaiah which would interest us, but we cannot at this time take them up specifically. Perhaps we may notice one particularly interesting chapter which we entitle, "The Song of the Vineyard," ch. 5. Later accounts of reaction and increased idolatry lead us to conclude that the effect of Isaiah's work was not so permanent and all-pervasive that conditions were greatly changed, and perhaps this song of the vineyard came considerably later, and expressed the disappointment of Isaiah in his people. Read 5:1-12. Vs. 13-17 again present the future in the present tense, and vs. 18-23 give us a series of woes pronounced upon the various types of wrongdoing which challenged the rebuke of Isaiah. It would be interesting now to take up chapter by chapter those portions which have not been discussed and to draw some conclusions from their contents as to the period to which they belong. There are many for instance who think that chs. 11, 12 are later than the first Isaiah but whoever was their author, they certainly present ideals of great beauty.



We have no knowledge of when or how Isaiah met his death. The biblical record tells us, however, that Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, who succeeded him on the throne, brought a long and disastrous reign so far, at least, as religion is concerned. Idolatry in all of its worst forms was restored throughout the land, and there were no moral evils in Assyria which might not be duplicated in the city of Jerusalem. It is generally believed that in the persecution of the prophets of Jehovah which doubtless came during this period Isaiah perished.

### THE BOOK OF MICAH

Another prophet, contemporaneous with Isaiah, presents a somewhat different attitude, not because his moral standards were different, but simply because he lived in the country, rather than in the city of Jerusalem. The little Book of Micah of Morasheth contains but a few chapters, and possibly not all of those can be properly attributed to this prophet. We should at least, however, read chapters 1-3. Isaiah had maintained throughout his life that Jerusalem would not be destroyed utterly, that Jehovah would protect his own holy city from the invasion of a foreigner, and on this belief had rested those wonderful prophecies of the deliverance of Jerusalem. Micah had quite a different view. He had no more interest in Jerusalem than in the homes of his fellow agriculturists in the villages and fields surrounding Jerusalem. These were falling into the hands of the enemy. Why should not Jerusalem fall also? Read Mic. 1:1-16, a wailing protest against the sin of Samaria and Jerusalem, and a picturesque depiction of the agony of the surrounding cities which had already fallen to the foe. Read chs. 2 and 3, making note of the sins which the prophet enumerates. Are they not precisely those things which Isaiah had described—extravagance, oppression, falsehood of every type, dissipation, drunkenness, disregard of the word of the prophets, dependence upon seers and diviners? Micah is, however, even more dramatic than Isaiah.

In 4:1-5, we have exactly the same statement as the beautiful passage which marked the beginning of one of Isaiah's great sermons, Isa. 2:2-4. We note it here because it helps us to see that there were in all probability many written messages passing about the country. We do not know whether Micah quotes from Isaiah or Isaiah quotes from Micah, or both quote from some earlier author, but it seems clear that this passage represents an ideal which was current in the days of these two men. We owe to the book of Micah a statement of the requirements of Jehovah more beautiful than that of any other prophet. We find it in 6:8, preceded by the question of the failure of sacrifice to satisfy a moral God such as the prophets believed Jehovah to be. "What doth Jehovah require of thee but to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Read the whole passage, verses 6-8. Whether these are the words of Micah or not, they show us the ethical ideal that was taking hold more strongly of each

successive prophet, and the ever-growing conviction that sacrifices and religious ceremonies could not purchase the favor of Israel's God.

How, now, shall we gather up a statement in modern terms which will convey the messages of these men to us today, apart from their great contribution to our historical knowledge of the progress of the religion which is the immediate ancestor of our own Christianity? The student will doubtless think of many such, but perhaps the following are outstanding:

1. A keen realization of the righteousness of God brings an equally keen aversion to unrighteous conduct, a sense of his justice leads to a hatred of injustice, and an appreciation of his sincerity to rejection of a type of worship which is insincere, no matter how elaborate.

2. Conviction of a great truth brings responsibility for the promulgation of that truth, no matter what the personal risks involved.

3. In the great crises of the world's history it has frequently been the word of one man which has had power to inspire those who have averted the crisis.

4. The details of a political or social or religious situation may affect great men differently, but in essentials they are liable to have the same point of view. It is a good thing, therefore, to put essentials first.

5. Our record of the work of the individual prophets is fragmentary but quite sufficient to enable us to see the force of their messages in their own day, and to estimate them justly as men called to unusual service, who were willing to give life itself in the task of making effective their ideals of God and conduct.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Have you read all the passages suggested in this study?
2. What is the conspicuous historical trend that appears in the chronological table with which this study opens?
3. With the reigns of what kings was Isaiah associated?
4. Describe the social conditions which surrounded him.
5. What religious conditions prevailed?
6. What political measures did Ahaz take and why?
7. Describe Isaiah's warnings at this time.
8. How were they received, and what facts of history later verified them?
9. How long did the siege of Samaria last? What does this suggest as to the strength of the city?
10. Why did Isaiah disapprove of any foreign alliance?
11. What alliance was proposed in 711 B.C., and how did Isaiah seek to influence the situation?
12. What was the political result of Judah's frequently recurring attempts at rebellion against Assyria?

13. How did Isaiah interpret the successes of Assyria?
14. What did Isaiah demand as the condition of deliverance of the nation?
15. Why did he feel that the city of Jerusalem could not be invaded by a foreign army?
16. Is it likely that the city would have been saved without his efforts?
17. Who was Micah, and how did he differ in opinion from Isaiah?
18. In what respects were their predictions in agreement?
19. Which is more important, that two prophets should agree in details or in their moral understanding of God?
20. In modern terms, what do you consider the greatest message of these two books?

## STUDY VI

JEREMIAH, DEUTERONOMY, NAHUM,  
AND ZEPHANIAH

We pass with this study to the consideration of the man who, to many people, seems to be the most interesting prophetic figure in all Israel's history—Jeremiah, whose name is indissolubly linked with the greatest of Israel's catastrophes, the fall of Jerusalem. We shall also have an opportunity to note the literary activities of the prophets of this and an earlier period, and the actual processes of prophetic writing through Jeremiah on a more elaborate scale than the tablet upon which Isaiah inscribed the significant name of his son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

The Book of Jeremiah, the longest in the Bible, is a collection of prophetic utterances, historical stories, and biographical sketches which are put together without regard to chronology or authorship. Many are about Jeremiah, others present his words, still others the words of men whose names we do not know, but who, having caught the spirit of Jeremiah, pass on to their fellows in their own written form his great thoughts about God and religious experience. One of these was Baruch, his faithful scribe.

Before entering upon the study of the book we must survey rapidly the history of the century between the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah. At the death of King Hezekiah in 697 B.C., he was succeeded by his son Manasseh, who at his accession was but a lad of twelve. It is evident, however, that he fell into the hands of the worst religious element of the land, for during his long reign of more than fifty years he led Jerusalem in all the excesses of idolatrous worship of the rankest kind, even erecting in the Temple itself altars to many gods. Read the story in II Kings 21:1-18. Who the prophets were who opposed him we do not know; possibly in this period Isaiah lost his life, for v. 16 seems to suggest persecution. He died and was succeeded by his son Amon who reigned but two years. Read vs. 19-26, recording the uprising in the king's household resulting in the assassination of the king and the placing upon the throne of his very young son Josiah, only eight years of age (639 B.C.). One wonders if perhaps this conspiracy was led by the prophetic and priestly Jehovah party, since in reading 22:1-3 we find that the young king was evidently under the guidance of this party through the period when he was growing up. If this theory be true, however, no deep impression was made upon the religious thought or customs of the people during the next decade, for idolatry was still practised at the high places and in Jerusalem.

As Josiah approached manhood there appeared upon the horizon one of those meteoric historical phenomena which have often surprised the world. The Scy-

thians, a race of savage, uncultured men coming from beyond the Black Sea region, swept down over the eastern Mediterranean country, destroying everything in their path, terrorizing the people of Jerusalem although not actually invading the territory of Judah.

We have already noted more than once a prophet's conception of God as using the nations to express to his own people his displeasure and his purpose of punishment. In the threatened invasion of the Scythians, so sudden and so swift, it was to be expected that the prophetic spirit would be stirred in some great soul. Jeremiah was but a young man at this time. Read Jer. 1:1 and note that he was of the priestly family of Hilkiyah and had grown up in the village of Anathoth, possibly a community of priests serving in the temple at Jerusalem.

Read what Jeremiah says of his own call to the work of a prophet in 1:4-10. Note a second vision in vs. 11, 12, and that in vs. 13-16 the call becomes very definitely associated with the threatened catastrophe from the north. No doubt this story was written in later years, and reflects Jeremiah's memory of his reluctance, and his feeling of inefficiency for a task such as the interpretation of coming disasters as the expression of Jehovah's wrath, on account of the idolatry and wickedness of the people. But the prophet recalls also, perhaps after years of struggle, the assurance to his soul of the presence and help of Jehovah, vs. 17-19.

While the chapter which follows (ch. 2) was probably not a specific address given on a particular occasion, it so well portrays the problem which confronted Jeremiah that we may read it here. May it be expressed somewhat as follows: vs. 1-3, In the wilderness Israel was holy and I protected her; vs. 4-6, What fault has been found in me as her God that she has forsaken me? vs. 7, 8, They have defiled the beautiful land which I gave them, and even their priests, rulers, and prophets have gone after other gods; vs. 9-13, What other nation ever changed its gods? The gods for which my people have forsaken me are worthless; vs. 14-19, The misfortunes of my people are the result of their own folly; vs. 20-25, Thou hast perverted the freedom which I gave thee and hast become degenerate, and now thou hast no power to change thyself; vs. 26-28, O, the shame of idolatry! Let thy sticks and stones save thee if they can! vs. 29, 30, Thy protestations are vain; vs. 31-37, Have I not seen? The nations to whose gods thou hast turned for protection shall but shame thee, for Jehovah hath rejected them as well as thee.

But to return to the Scythian invasion. Read ch. 4, a call to last-hour repentance in view of the disaster which threatens. Notice, v. 2, that Jehovah's call to faithfulness demands conduct in conformity with his character of truth, justice, and righteousness. It is the kind of life which idolatry fosters which is eating the heart of the nation. Vs. 3-7, Consecrate yourselves anew to Jehovah. Let the people in the countryside flee to the fortified cities. The destroyer is on the way. Vs. 8-10, Weep and wail, ye kings and priests and prophets, for it is a death blow which is coming. Vs. 11-13, No longer a chastisement, but ruin and death. Vs. 14-18, Only a complete change of heart and life can save. Vs. 19-22,



Though it is anguish to my heart, I must speak, but my people are drunk with their foolishness; they cannot understand. Vs. 23-29, Complete destruction is coming, v. 30, and the scorn of nations. V. 31, they cry out in their anguish, but, 5:1-10 Jehovah can find no good in them that he should save them. Vs. 10-19, I command to destroy.

Continue with the remainder of the chapter and read also ch. 6. Note especially how frequently Jeremiah alludes to the princes, prophets, and priests in whom the people should have found wise leadership, but who in times like these are speaking words of peace. To Jeremiah only words which would rouse the people to see the folly of their present way of living were possible. All other leadership he denounced as false and misleading.

Recall that in 639 B.C. the young Josiah came to the throne, a lad of eight years. The second Book of Kings, the 22d chapter gives an interesting and important account which suggests that the activities of Jeremiah and his associates were not without effect in their influence upon those in high office. Josiah, now a young man, apparently handling for himself the affairs of the kingdom, has the conviction that the temple of Jehovah which has been so frequently desecrated by idolatrous worship should be repaired and restored to an appropriate place for the worship of Jehovah.

Read II Kings 22:3-7. Note that the priests and prophets were evidently co-operating with Josiah in his renovating of the temple, for he trusts them explicitly with the funds for the work which have been gathered from the offerings of the people. This fact also suggests that the Jehovah party was supporting Josiah, and was strong among the people at this time. Previous to this, so far as we know, the recorded law was that of the early days in Canaan, a code designed for an agricultural people, supplemented from time to time by special laws for which necessity arose in the progress of the nation from an agricultural to a city stage. Read II Kings 22:8, and note that Hilkiah the high priest reports to the royal scribe that he has found a book in the temple which is a roll of the law. Read vs. 9, 10, which tell us that, after reading the book, Shaphan the scribe reported the matter to the king and read the roll to him. In vs. 11-13 we find that the king's consternation at the contents of this book was so great that he immediately took steps to find out if it was authoritative. Vs. 14-20 describe the visit to the prophetess Huldah, who, when consulted, declared that the book represented the genuine law of Jehovah, and since the people had been guilty of the sins which it forbids they could be punished. However, because of Josiah's desire to know the law of Jehovah and to keep it, the punishment shall not come in his day.

Read carefully ch. 23:1-27, which records a drastic and forced reformation. Note its effect upon the paraphernalia of idolatrous worship, upon the sacred places of the people throughout the land, and upon the priests associated with all these ancient local sanctuaries. V. 27 is the climax.

The Scythians had not invaded Judah, but had unexpectedly turned back. Josiah was a good king. The Jehovah party was for the moment dominant. Whether this book that was found was the work of prophets and priests of that time or earlier, we do not know, but at all events it was used now to force the reformation, perhaps at the time when recent deliverance from the Scythians had made the people especially susceptible to a great religious movement. Such a Passover Feast had not been held in many a year. It gave token of at least the nominal approval of the people.

But can we in our present Bible discover any trace of this book which was found? There are many who think that it is now contained in our

*Book of Deuteronomy.*—Glance through Deut., chs. 12-26. Note in ch. 12 the instructions to destroy all idolatrous sanctuaries with all that was used in them, and to worship Jehovah only in the one place of his choice, a place which shall be holy (we must understand that at the ancient sanctuaries it was frequently the case that both Jehovah and other gods were worshipped). Notice that through all the chapters runs the idea of holiness and that this holiness is frequently elaborated as kindness to the poor, 15:7-11, justice to the hireling and the slave, the inclusion of all classes in the sacred feasts at the holy place, 16:11, 14, 18-20. To this law even the king must be faithful, and his faithfulness was further defined as dependence upon Jehovah alone, with no foreign domination or alliance, 17:14-20. Purity of worship was secured by confining the priesthood to one tribe, 18:5. Only chosen prophets shall speak with the authority of God, and the test of their authority shall be the fulfilment of their words, 18:9-22.

What other portions of this Book of Deuteronomy were present at this time we cannot tell, but through its earlier chapters we find that this more elaborate development of the ancient laws, supplemented by new law, is presented in the form of orations of Moses who after surveying the wilderness experiences exhorts the people to be faithful to Jehovah in the land to which they are going, reiterating the commands reported in Exodus with some changes (compare carefully Exod. 20 and Deut. 5), and tells how these laws were given to him. All this forms an introduction to the more elaborate and specific laws which we have noted in chs. 12-26.

Underlying it all, however, is a new spirit. The yearning of the prophets of Jeremiah's day over the people who knew not God as they the prophets knew him. Read Deut. 6:4-9. Love of Jehovah is the motive which will enable the people to obey, a love which is reciprocated by Jehovah and which must be persistently taught to their children.

We may with this brief survey sum up the teaching of the great law book as "one God, Jehovah, faithful and powerful, whom to love is to obey; one holy place of worship chosen by him; one holy priesthood." These were the doctrines which Jeremiah and his fellow-prophets sought to impress, and such was the reformation to the permanent success of which they devoted themselves.

*The death of Josiah.*—Returning to the account in II Kings, read 23:29, 30. In what spirit the young king Josiah went out against the king of Egypt who was passing through toward Assyria in a war which did not involve Judah we do not know, but however that may have come about, his death in the battle of Megiddo put an end to his reformation. Within three weeks Jehoahaz, who had been made

king in his place, probably also having anti-Egyptian attitudes, was carried in bonds to Egypt where he later died, and his brother Jehoiakim was placed upon the throne of Judah as an Egyptian vassal. Read Jer. 22:1-12, Jeremiah's interpretation of this event.

Keep in mind the religious problem which Jeremiah now faced. The good king was dead. Faithfulness to Jehovah had been rewarded with sudden death. Early death had always been considered by the Hebrews as a sign of Jehovah's displeasure. What kind of god was Jehovah? Was it possible that he could not have saved his king? Were Egyptian gods stronger than he? So concluded many of the people. Idolatry returned with all its force. The high places were rebuilt, the old worship restored, and the temple again profaned by the worship of foreign gods. Read Jer. 11:1-14, and try to enter into the feeling of Jeremiah as he curses in the name of Jehovah the condition of things as he sees it.

Perhaps standing in the very gates of the temple, he warns the people that no reliance upon the protection of its sacred courts will save them. Conduct pleasing to Jehovah was their only hope. Read Jer. 7:1-11. Note that in vs. 12-15 he recalls the destruction of a previous holy place, the ancient Shiloh. Vs. 16-23 point out the reasons for his wrath, confirmed by the wrath of Jehovah against a people who insist upon obtaining the favor of Jehovah through sacrifices rather than obedience. Read the dismal pictures of chs. 7, 8. His was a hard life in those days. Even his own townsmen turned against him and thought of him as a "dismal croaker." Read 11:14-23, in which we find the men of Anathoth plotting to get rid of Jeremiah.

Remember that there were many priests whose work had been taken away by the abolition of the high places, and they now seized the opportunity to regain their old influence over the people, and we may be sure that they succeeded.

The reign of Jehoiakim, 608-597 B.C., was outwardly a prosperous one during these early years. While the Egyptian tribute was exacting, it did not by any means impoverish the people, and Jehoiakim's own demands upon them for carrying out great building schemes were far heavier than the foreign tax. The desire to compare favorably with larger and richer kingdoms seems to have animated the king. The process by which this result was achieved had little relation to ethical standards. Jeremiah's opinion of the matter is interesting. Read 22:13-19. Jeremiah would brook no compromise with dishonesty, tyranny, and selfish aggrandizement.

A few years after the accession of Jehoiakim an event which changed the face of history for the ancient nations occurred. Assyria, unable to hold together her loosely knit empire of vassal states, fled before the combined attack of the Medes who had made an alliance with Babylon, the most formidable of the Assyrian provinces. Her capital, Nineveh, was destroyed. About a year later Nebuchadnezzar, the son of the new king of Babylon, met and defeated Pharaoh-Necho of Egypt at Carchemish, and to Babylon fell the dependencies of Egypt, among them Judah and

Jerusalem. (This was one of the most important battles in the world's history.) Judah narrowly escaped desolation, but suffered much from the ravages of the invading armies, and was in great uncertainty concerning her future fate. Read Jer. 9:17-22 and 10:17-22, words calculated to bring little comfort to the terror-stricken people of Judah, yet expressing the only interpretation which Jeremiah could give to this situation.

Jer. 46:1-12 contains a song of triumph over Egypt which may refer to this great victory. It is difficult for us to realize the full significance of these changes. Assyria and Egypt had dominated the world for centuries. Now one had disappeared and the other slipped into the background before two new powers. Notwithstanding the uncertainty of the future there was great rejoicing over the fallen enemy.

*The Book of Nahum.*—The Book of Nahum presents a ringing paean of praise to Jehovah who has destroyed this city of Nineveh, an act interpreted by Nahum as vengeance because of Assyria's treatment of Israel and other lands which she conquered. Read carefully Nahum, chs. 1-3, and note the vividness of the descriptions, the rejoicing of the prophet, so unrestrained as to be almost barbaric. Yet underneath it all, do we not feel a sense of the justice of Jehovah which has brought Nineveh to her end?

It was this same sense of justice which led Jeremiah so persistently to warn Israel of a like fate. Jehoiakim, having been placed upon the throne by Egypt, could not easily turn his allegiance to Babylon. He was forced to submit by Nebuchadnezzar, who had succeeded his father as king of Babylon, but he was rebellious and unreliable, and Nebuchadnezzar frequently left him unprotected from the raids of the surrounding smaller countries. Jeremiah saw no happy future for this people save that which might come as a result of complete harmony with Jehovah. The conduct of the king was certain to bring political ruin.

In a land such as Palestine, where there was little water, the failure of the seasonal rains meant famine, and such disasters were always definitely attributed to the anger of Jehovah. Read 14:1-6, the prophet's description of one of these droughts; vs. 7-9, his impassioned prayer for relief of the distressed land; vs. 10-12, his representation of Jehovah's answer, not alone famine, but worse than famine—war—is coming. Note that his arraignment, vs. 13-18, includes both prophet and priest. Who were these prophets whom here and elsewhere he condemns? Note the character of their prophecies. Were they not men who regarded themselves as spokesmen of Jehovah, but who were so influenced by their own wishes and their desire to please the king rather than by any real ability to see the situation, and to understand the forces of good and evil, that they were unable to speak the real message of Jehovah and to influence those powers that were destroying the kingdom? Read the test of the true prophet which we have already seen laid down in Deut. 18:9-22.

Read ch. 25, and note that here, as did the prophets of a century earlier, Jeremiah interprets Israel's coming conqueror as the agent of Jehovah, this time



Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Note especially vs. 7-11. Recalling the wonderful deliverance of Jerusalem from the siege of Sennacherib, is it strange that the people could not believe that Jehovah would allow Jerusalem to be destroyed? Jeremiah's bitter protestations fell for the most part on deaf ears, and only served to array a host of enemies against him personally.

Imagine yourself among the people standing in the courts of the temple where Jeremiah utters such words as those suggested in 26:1-7. Think whether you too would not have been in that crowd of priests, prophets, and people who fell upon Jeremiah, calling him to account for his words and pronouncing him worthy to die. The temple courts adjoined the palace. The news of the arrest of Jeremiah quickly reached the princes before whom he was publicly accused, vs. 10-12. He defended himself bravely, did not retract his words, but continued to protest that Jehovah had sent him to speak this very message, vs. 13-15. Note that his enemies were impressed with his persistence in the face of possible death, vs. 16-19, and they recalled a former case of a prophet of disaster, and the fact that not only was he not killed, but because of his teaching, the people changed their ways and Jehovah changed his attitude. Was that not just what Jeremiah was hoping from his own ministry? The case is immediately cited of another prophet, vs. 20-23, who but recently had been brought back from Egypt where he had fled for safety, and had been killed by King Jehoiakim, and his body dishonored. However, as a result of their discussion and through the influence of the son of Shaphan the royal scribe, Jeremiah's life was saved. Possibly at this time he was imprisoned.

Jeremiah in his prison, however, refused to be quiet. Ch. 36 gives us an excellent illustration of the method of prophetic writing as well as of the indomitable spirit of the prophet, buoyed up by the hope expressed in 36:3. Note the writing of the message, v. 4, the instructions to Baruch, to whom the roll was dictated, vs. 5-7. Then came the public reading of the book on a great fast-day, when the city was full of strangers. The reading took place in a court at an important entrance to the temple, vs. 9, 10. The public reading so affected the people that word was sent to the princes, and Baruch was summoned to appear with his book before them, vs. 11-14. Baruch read the roll in the presence of the great men, who warned him to hide himself and Jeremiah from the wrath of the king when he should learn the contents of the roll, vs. 15-19. The king, unlike his father Josiah on a similar occasion, was cool and indifferent, and did not even hear the roll through, but contemptuously seized it, slashed it with a knife, and threw it into the fire, commanding his courtiers to seize Jeremiah and Baruch, but the latter had taken the advice of the princes and the two were in hiding, vs. 20-26. Jeremiah not only re-wrote the message of the roll which had been destroyed by the king, again entrusting it to Baruch, but he kept on writing, vs. 27-32.

In about 600 B.C. Jehoiakim began to weary of paying tribute to Nebuchadnezzar and rebelled, probably encouraged by Egypt, but before the army sent by Nebuchadnezzar to deal with Judah had reached Jerusalem Jehoiakim had died



and his son Jehoiachin had succeeded him. But Nebuchadnezzar's purpose of punishment was not turned aside. Read the story in II Kings 24:10-16, a siege of the city resulting in the surrender of Jehoiachin and the carrying off to Babylon of great treasure, the king, all the men and women of rank, all the soldiers, craftsmen, and thousands, including all save the poorest, of the people. A third son of Josiah, Zedekiah, was placed upon the throne, a young, weak, vacillating man upon whom no dependence could be placed. Read also in this connection Jer. 22:18-30. Through this event Jeremiah was vindicated as a prophet. The disaster that had come was overwhelming. Its very greatness seemed to indicate its sufficiency. Surely now there was nothing more to fear. So the people comforted themselves. But not Jeremiah. Read ch. 24 which suggests that the people who were left in Judah seemed to Jeremiah like the bad figs, too corrupt to save. Jeremiah felt that the future of the nation lay with those more intelligent citizens who had been carried away rather than with the miserable remnant that was left in Jerusalem. Yet the *city* of Jerusalem might be saved from destruction, and to this task Jeremiah set himself by urging upon the king steady submission to the King of Babylon. Meanwhile the court prophets cheerfully predicted the breaking of the Babylonian yoke. Read ch. 27 which tells us how Jeremiah went about wearing a yoke symbolizing the yoke of Babylon, which Jehovah intended that the people should submissively wear, vs. 1-8. False prophets opposed, but Jeremiah was not moved by them, vs. 9-15. He proclaimed in the temple courts that if they would not listen the few remaining ornaments and vessels of the temple would be carried away to Babylon. One of the false prophets, Hananiah, challenged Jeremiah's statement. Read the controversy between these two in ch. 28, and the spectacular breaking of the yoke, only to find it replaced by one of iron.

Jeremiah was not content with struggling only with the people in Jerusalem. Ch. 29 reports a letter sent by him to those of his people who had been carried away to Babylon. Read vs. 1-13. Notice how he counsels contentment in Babylon, the building of homes and the planting of vineyards, the rearing of children in the expectation of many years of residence there.

For eight or nine years Zedekiah remained sufficiently loyal to Babylon to prevent disaster, and then, persuaded by the King of Egypt, he rebelled and brought Nebuchadnezzar with a besieging army. Surrender was the only safe policy and the one which Jeremiah advised, but Zedekiah was stubborn.

The spectacular appeal was the only one which could command attention in days like these. Read the story of the Rechabites, ch. 35, an object lesson in faithfulness and obedience to an ideal imposed upon them by an ancestor. The Rechabites were a tribe descended from the Kenites, who in ancient times had been friendly to the Hebrews and now looked to them for protection. Jeremiah had doubtless come upon this band which the invasion of the Babylonian army had driven for

shelter into the city. Everybody knew who they were and what was their habit of life. They were bound by an ancient vow neither to drink wine nor to dwell in houses or cities. Now imagine yourself among a throng in the temple courts. Jeremiah comes in, leading into one of the great chambers of the temple this company of Rechabites, 35:1-4. Note his strange action in view of their vow, v. 5, and the answer of their leader, Jonadab, vs. 6-11. They had been faithful to their vow of abstinence, and only the exigency of war had driven them within the city. Not a soul was there in that crowd who would not admire and honor Jonadab for his boldness and fidelity. Now see Jeremiah turn upon the people to drive the lesson home. Read vs. 12-17 and compare his words to the people with his speech to Jonadab, vs. 18, 19.

Jeremiah was now in a more dangerous situation than ever before. With a foreign army outside the walls he was counseling surrender. Was he in league with the enemy? Certainly from the point of view of many he was a dangerous personage and must be made to keep quiet or be placed in seclusion. The story continues in ch. 18. Read 18:1-3, which holds out to the people the chance of salvation by a complete change of attitude toward Jehovah's word. V. 18 shows us in what spirit the message was received. "Jeremiah was a fool. Priests, wise men, prophets, all had given assurance that Jerusalem should not perish. Who was Jeremiah that he should set himself above these, the traditional religious leaders of the past?" Jeremiah cried out to Jehovah in his agony of soul, vs. 19-23. Read also 19:1-13, another story of dramatic action, leading this time to the definite arrest of Jeremiah. The story continues in 19:14-20:6. Jeremiah, after chastisement and a night spent in the agony of the stocks where he was placed by the command of the chief officer of the temple, retracted not one word of his message, but insisted that to prolong the siege was to sacrifice the city. Fidelity to his duty did not make Jeremiah happy, however. He was too closely bound in the "bundle of lives" of his beloved people. Read 20:7-18, in which we find him cursing the day on which he was born.

The king Zedekiah, as vacillating in his thinking as in his action, was afraid to kill Jeremiah. What if the things that Jeremiah said were true? Note carefully his inquiry through Passhur who had imprisoned Jeremiah, 21:1, 2. Jeremiah's answer is unflinching: "Surrender, or the city will be burned," 21:3-10.

Some time during the period of the siege an Egyptian army sought to relieve Jerusalem, and the people seized upon this as a sign that Jehovah had intervened to save his city. Not so thought Jeremiah who was now going freely about the city. Read what he said in 37:1-10. Going out of the city gates to visit his old home, he found that even there he was branded as a traitor, and again he was returned to Jerusalem and imprisoned, vs. 11-15. This time he was placed in a deep dungeon. Read the thrilling story of his steadfast adherence to his own message, vs. 16, 17. His pleading with Zedekiah for release brought him a

tempered imprisonment, with greater liberty and daily food, but his respite was brief. His dismal forebodings were being quoted everywhere. In ch. 38:1-5 we find Zedekiah unable to withstand the importunities of his officials, and Jeremiah was given into their hands. They put him into a miry pit in the innermost prison, 38:6-13. He was secretly rescued, however, by the king, who promised not to allow him to be imprisoned again.

The remainder of the story is short. Jeremiah's last interview with the king and later with the princes who were seeking to encourage the king to hold out against Babylon is given to us in 38:14-28. Ch. 39 relates the story of the entrance of the Babylonian princes through a breach in the walls and the formal taking possession of the city, 39:1-4. The fleeing king was captured, his eyes put out and his sons killed, the city burned, the walls broken down, and all persons and things that possessed any value in the eyes of Babylon carried away, vs. 5-10.

But what about Jeremiah? Read 39:11-14 and 40:1-6. No doubt there were many who told the Babylonians of Jeremiah's warnings and the failure of king and princes to heed them. At all events, Jeremiah had his opportunity to go unshackled, with the captives to a place of honor in Babylon or to stay in desolated Judah with a little group of undesirables without homes or protection. He chose the latter. The story of the little colony, contained in 40:7-43:13, records a procession of disasters and finally an emigration to Egypt against the persistent protestations of the prophet. Loyal to the last, however, he accompanied them. Ch. 44 gives us a vivid picture of Jeremiah's struggle against the continued idolatry of his people even in Egypt. The argument of the people against Jeremiah's protests is a natural one. The marvel is that Jeremiah himself was not moved by it.

Here we leave this most tragic of prophetic lives which many have likened to the sacrificial life of Jesus himself. What suggestions has it for us?

Jeremiah entered upon his career with a definite theology inherited from his fathers. "The righteous prosper, the wicked perish." In the great changes which came he saw good and bad suffer together. He knew himself to be approved of Jehovah, yet how he suffered, and how his persecutors triumphed. Even in the end many of them became rich and prosperous in Babylon. Religion became to him, as it must eventually become to all of us, an experience of God through life. His conviction of the character of God was an inner experience. He could not doubt it nor distrust it. God was righteous, just, and faithful. He would change his attitude when an obedient people gave him the opportunity. From this position Jeremiah never wavered. If the people did not turn in obedience to Jehovah, Jehovah *could not change* and be true to his character. Neither could or did Jeremiah. No more can or will men of strong and righteous conviction today if their conviction be based on intelligence and experience of God.

## THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

Before leaving this period of history we must glance at a short book which bears the name of the prophet Zephaniah. Read Zeph. 1:1, and note that the prophet is said to be the grandson of Hezekiah, and that he prophesied in the days of King Josiah. We cannot rely wholly upon superscriptions, as they were frequently added at a much later date. Let us see if the contents of the book bear out the suggestion of the superscription. We should find in this book some hint of the same conditions which our study of the early days of Jeremiah revealed. Read 1:1—2:2. Does this section not seem to reflect the times of the terrible Scythian invasion which Jeremiah described as the "boiling cauldron" from the north? A close study of the remainder of ch. 2 and of ch. 3 brings difficulties by introducing historical allusions inconsistent with this early date, but like many other early prophetic books, we doubtless have in the first chapter a fragment of the work of one prophet to which has been added the words of other and later prophets. The fragment that we have, however, confirms our theory that in the early days of Jeremiah there was a considerable group of prophets concerned in the reformation with Josiah. This book adds nothing to the religious teaching of the period further than that which we have already noted in more brilliant and impressive form in Jeremiah.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What would you consider important dates to be remembered in connection with this study?
2. Describe the reaction that followed the death of Hezekiah.
3. What were the influences that brought about a better state of things during the youth of Josiah?
4. What were the immediate causes of the reformation under Josiah?
5. What are the outstanding doctrines of the Book of Deuteronomy, and the ideas of what group of people do they reflect?
6. Which one of these doctrines caused the most radical feature of Josiah's reformation, and what were its disadvantages from the point of view of the people?
7. Who was Jeremiah?
8. In what spirit did he receive his call?
9. What historical event inspired the early sermons which we find in his book?
10. What event brought the reforms to a sudden end and why?
11. How was the problem of Jeremiah complicated by the loss of the king, and what was the point of his prophecies in the early days of Jehoiakim?
12. What historical events of universal significance occurred in Jehoiakim's reign?

13. What was the fate of Judah in this general change?
14. What was the attitude of Jehoiakim toward Jeremiah? Name several of the chapters of Jeremiah containing sermons growing out of this reign.
15. To the maintenance of what political attitude were Jeremiah's efforts directed during the years of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah?
16. How successful was he?
17. What religious attitude did he strive to cultivate in rulers and people?
18. How successful was he?
19. What do you think of Jeremiah?
20. The messages of what other prophets belonged to this period, and what particular events inspired them?



## STUDY VII

## I, II KINGS, EZEKIEL, AND ISAIAH 40-66

## THE BOOKS OF KINGS

In our study of the prophets, we have unconsciously and without effort gained an insight into another book, or rather two books, which now stand in our Bible as I and II Kings. It will be easy to summarize these books at this point. Read quickly through chapters 1 to 11 of I Kings, and find the story of the death of David and the succession of Solomon. There follows a series of stories of Solomon, chiefly illustrating his wisdom, and a detailed description of the building of his royal palace, and the temple of Jehovah. The account ends, however, with a condemnation of his marriage alliances with foreign countries and the luxurious living in which Solomon imitated the kings of his day. Read 11:43—12:24 and note that at the death of Solomon revolution divided the kingdom into North and South and two kings were set up, the southern king being the direct descendant of David, and the northern king a man apparently chosen by the prophets. See 11:26-40. Read 12:25-33, and note the establishment of a special sanctuary which would keep the people from going to Jerusalem for worship in the temple, a necessity which seemed to Jeroboam to be dangerous to the Northern Kingdom. In chapter 13 we find another story of the prophets, who, although they had been so influential in putting Jeroboam upon the throne, did not now approve of his religious policy. In chapter 14, we find the same prophet who announced to Jeroboam that he should become king announcing to him that his kingdom shall be taken from him. The writer of the book explains to us in 15:25-30 that the revolution under Baasha was the fulfilment of the word of Ahijah.

Analyzing chapters 15 and 16, we find parallel accounts of the history of Israel and Judah through a period of years. Apart, however, from an occasional mention of war between the Northern and Southern kingdoms, a war in which Syria is called upon to participate on behalf of Judah, there is little of a political or social nature found in these chapters. On the other hand, considerable space is given to facts concerning religion, the existence of idol-worship, or the destruction of idol-worship, as in the case of Baasha. Omri, mentioned in the sixteenth chapter, was, we learn from outside sources, a king who extended Israel's territory and commanded the respect of the surrounding nations. Notice that some of these kings reigned from twelve to twenty years. Does it not seem to you that the person who gives us this narrative was much more interested in religion than

in politics, and to him the important thing in connection with each king was whether he was faithful to Jehovah and did not permit the worship of other gods?

Read 16:29-34, 17, 18, and 19. Here we have the same characteristic emphasis upon religion, with an introduction which tells of Ahab's marriage to the daughter of the king of the Zidonians, and the consequent introduction of the Phoenician Baal-worship into Israel. This long passage records a single phase of the reign of Ahab, his contact with Elijah, the prophet. These stories are evidently intended to impress the reader with the importance of the prophet among the Hebrews and his superiority to the king, for through him came the direct word of Jehovah, who was Israel's real ruler.

Read in chapter 20 of a war between Ahab, the king of Israel, and Ben-hadad of Syria, in which Ahab was victorious, but the covenant which Ahab made with Ben-hadad was not satisfactory to the prophets. Vs. 35-43 give a very interesting interview between the prophet and the king. Chapter 21 suggests that the prophet was a champion of the people in the cause of social justice, and at its end the King stands humiliated before the prophet Elijah.

If we were to continue our reading through as far as the death of Elisha, recorded in II Kings 13:20, we should find that while this book is called *Kings*, and purports to be a record of the kings of Israel, it is much more a record of the relation of these kings to the prophets, and to the progress of the Jehovah religion in Israel and Judah. The veneration, amounting almost to worship, in which the two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, were held, is indicated by the many stories of miracles performed by these two men, by the story of the translation of Elijah, II Kings 2:11, 12, and by such traditions as that concerning Elisha whose dead bones were said to be able to revive a man who had died and been put into the same sepulchre, II Kings 13:20, 21. Back of all such stories there are certain to have been great characters who impressed the imagination as well as the practical life of the people. Run quickly through the remainder of II Kings, noting that in the seventeenth chapter we find Samaria falling into the hands of the Assyrians, and the Northern Kingdom coming to an end. Henceforth the book is devoted to the story of Judah, and we are brought down, in the last chapter, to the captivity in Babylon, after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Our question now is, in what sense are the Books of Kings historical books? They were clearly based upon court records, extending over a long period of years. Note I Kings 16:14, 20, 27, reference to the *Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*, and II Kings 15:6, 36, to the *Chronicles of the Kings of Judah*. One cannot fail to see, however, that there is a religious purpose and a religious interpretation of history running through the entire collection. The author of the books is giving us a history of religion. He wishes us to see with his own eyes of condemnation, those kings who introduced other gods and encouraged idolatry, regardless of what they might have done in the extension of the kingdom, and its improvement from

an external point of view. He disapproves all alliances with foreign nations, and gives a great deal of attention and praise to those kings who carried through reforms favorable to the worship of Jehovah. In other words, we have here what may be termed pragmatic history, that is, history written with a purpose; in this case the purpose being quite apparently to lead the Hebrew people to see that loyalty to Jehovah must be the national ideal, and that disobedience to this ideal led to all the disasters of the nation, and to its final captivity. We must conclude, therefore, that as history the accounts are very meagre, but such as they are, we must continually turn to them for the historical setting of our prophets. Moreover, we are likely to conclude that it is the religious leaders of Israel to whom we are indebted for even this meagre account of her history.

### THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

From this rapid survey of the Books of Kings, bringing us up to the captivity, we turn to one of the great prophets of the captivity, Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a member of a priestly family living in Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah. To what extent he was influenced by Jeremiah, we cannot tell. It is quite possible that he was familiar with Jeremiah's teachings, and with the attitude of Jeremiah toward the life of the people in Jerusalem, and toward their political and social leaders. In the study of Ezekiel we must go back to the period of the *first* captivity, for Ezekiel was one of the young men who was carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon in 597 B.C. In the opening verses of his book he tells us that his home was by the river Chebar in the land of Babylon, and that in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity he received a revelation from God, Ezek. 1:1-3.

In order to understand what conditions, combined with a sense of the divine call, led Ezekiel to preach to his people, we must review the situation of the Hebrews in Babylonia, where they had now been for five years. They were, you will remember, the cream of the population of Jerusalem, the king and his courtiers, the best of the craftsmen and tradespeople—thousands of the very best people which the old Jerusalem contained. You will recall that Jeremiah spoke of them as the "good figs," and the people who remained in Jerusalem as the "bad figs" (Jer., ch. 24), and that to these people Jeremiah wrote a letter (Jer. 29:1-13) commending to them a quiet, happy, and prosperous life in Babylon, for it would be many years their home. We can imagine these people settling down somewhat comfortably to their life in Babylon. They were in a colony by themselves, they could develop their own activities. Those who had been leaders in Jerusalem could be leaders here, among themselves. To an extent they could participate in the prosperous life of Babylon. Some of them might even be better satisfied with the conditions which they found here than with those which maintained in the old city of their birth. Because of the circumstances of their coming, as well as the strength of their loyalty to their home land,

the majority of them would, however, expect to go back to Jerusalem, and they would regard their home in Babylon as temporary. They doubtless watched continually for news from Jerusalem, and anticipated that in some way Jerusalem would throw off the Babylonian yoke. Jehovah's anger would be appeased when the punishment of his people was completed, and they would be taken back to their own city, where, having learned the lesson of obedience, they would be faithful to Jehovah, and prosperous for the remainder of their days.

Ezekiel, however, had no such rosy view as this. He was aware, that notwithstanding the great depletion of the city's population, life in Jerusalem was going on in the same reckless way as before the deportation. Kings were playing politics, religions of many lands were practised in the temple, the people were as far away as ever from appreciating the demands of Jehovah for right conduct, and as we know, Jeremiah was wearing himself out in the effort to convince the people of the error of their ways and to make them turn to Jehovah in righteousness and justice, and to place their dependence in him, rather than in foreign nations and foreign gods.

The first twenty-four chapters of Ezekiel give to us a series of sermons or speeches with which he tried to prepare the people in Babylonia for the fall of Jerusalem which he plainly saw impending. To him the religion of Jehovah had come to be something which was not inseparably attached to the city of Jerusalem. The time had come when it was necessary to expand the popular religion which associated Jehovah only with Jerusalem and with the temple of Jehovah, for soon he was convinced that they would be in ruins. To Ezekiel, also, the consciousness of Jehovah's presence and power was stronger even in Babylonia than it had been in Jerusalem, for it was down there, among the captives that he had found his deepest religious experience.

Let us now turn to the book and note the characteristics of this man whose prophecy has a form peculiarly its own. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 give us the story of Ezekiel's call. Read 1:4-28. Do not try to analyze the complicated visions. There are many who have tried to make drawings of them and to picture them in detail and the result was a ludicrous failure. Think of them rather as seeking to describe something which was beyond description, culminating in the voice of the Almighty, and the wonderful personality before whom Ezekiel falls upon his face. Does this description help us to realize that the god of Ezekiel's youth had, under his new experiences in this foreign land, become greatly magnified and infinitely more majestic? In 2:1-7, the prophet is definitely told what his mission is to be—a preacher to the people in Babylon who no doubt would disregard his word just as their fellow-Jews had disregarded the views of Jeremiah back in Jerusalem. 2:8—3:3 seems to suggest that the message of Ezekiel is to become his very life as food becomes the life of those who partake of it. 3:4-11 warns the prophet of hard times ahead, vs. 12-15 of long meditation upon the task which was before him, which after seven days he accepted with humility of spirit, feeling, vs. 16-21,



that to know the right way and not to preach it would make him responsible for the wickedness of his fellow-men. He must at least do all that he could to hold his fellow-captives loyal to Jehovah, in anticipation of the shock to their faith which must come when the city of Jerusalem should be destroyed.

Ezekiel talks in pictures. Read ch. 4, a series of symbolic acts through which he tries to portray a siege of Jerusalem, vs. 1-3 by picturing it on a tile, just as a child might do when he was playing a siege of a city. Vs. 4-8 he lies inactive, as the people must be, who are to endure this siege; vs. 9-17, eating the food in quantity and quality such as the food to be eaten by the people when Jerusalem should come to her last extremity. Read 5:5-17, in which the prophet fully explains why it is that Jehovah will deal thus with his people. Read ch. 7, which seeks to portray conditions which must have existed when the city was very near its fall. Read 8:1-4, in which the prophet, sitting before his house in Babylon with the great people of the Jews around him, described himself as lifted up above the earth and brought to the very gates of Jerusalem. The terrible things which he saw in Jerusalem and his interpretation of them follows, in 8:5-11:21, after which he is again lifted up and set down by the river Chebar, where he speaks of his vision as suggested in 8:1-4.

That the prophet was a picturesque figure among the dwellers in Babylon is very certain. We can imagine the little groups forming about him from day to day, and wondering among themselves what Ezekiel would do next, yet inwardly shuddering at the form and the terror of his messages. Notice 12:1-7, in which he moves his household goods out of his house, and vs. 8-16, where he maintains that thus the people shall be taken out of Jerusalem.

Let us for a moment think of what, all this time, may have been the attitude of the Jews who remained in Jerusalem toward those who were taken into captivity. Would it not be natural for them to think that those who were carried away were particularly sinful in the eyes of Jehovah, and that those who were allowed to remain in the city were better than their brethern who were taken away? This was one of the problems which the people of the captivity had to face. Ch. 17 shows us how Ezekiel explains the matter, in brief, O ye people of Jerusalem, it was I who took the top twig of the cedar tree and carried it to the land of Babylon. Because of the disobedience of the people I did it, and I will carry away the remainder of the people for the very same reason. From that cedar twig which I planted in Babylon shall come a tree. And from its lofty top will I take a young and tender twig which planted in the mountains of Israel shall in turn become a great tree.

It is a fact of history that new religious ideas are born in the midst of circumstances for the interpretation of which the old religious ideas are not adequate. So Ezekiel, when the destruction of Jerusalem and the elimination of the Jews as a nation came, finds a new way by which Jehovah will fulfill his covenant with his people. No longer does he deal with men as families and a nation but as



individuals. Read ch. 18, in which, over and over in various ways, the prophet reiterates his idea that every man will be responsible for his own conduct, shall suffer for his own sins, and be rewarded for his own righteousness. It is difficult for us to realize what a great step this was in the development of the religion of Israel, how it enhanced the personality of God, how it increased the sense of personal responsibility of the individual, how it inspired each man to create and to live up to ideals of his own, how it helped him to feel that his own life was not lost in the life of his nation, but had an entity of its own, and was recognized by Jehovah.

We have not time to continue a careful examination of the remaining chapters of this first section, chs. 1-24, but we cannot afford to pass, without noting 24:15-18, the day on which the prophet's wife died. In view of the distress and anguish which had accompanied the siege of Jerusalem, and the certainty of her fall, the prophet refrained from mourning or weeping on account of his own sorrow, but joined in the lament of his people over the catastrophe, for news of which they waited from day to day.

The blow came. Tidings of the fall of the city reached Babylon, and in due time the little colony in Babylonia was increased by a crowd of fellow-citizens, who, headed by the blinded king Zedekiah, were brought to Babylon by the generals of Nebuchadnezzar. Can we imagine the story of the siege which would be told, the recitations of the warnings of Jeremiah, the stories of the false prophets, and the vacillations of the king? Can we picture to ourselves the consternation of the community in Babylon which had so confidently expected that the city would be spared? What would be the conclusion of those who had always thought of Jehovah as belonging to the land of Palestine, and existing for no other people or place? We can conclude that there was great bewilderment and confusion in thought. What about the future? How could they remain loyal to a god who could not save his own city? Yet how could they be disloyal to the God whom many of them had come to feel was a god not of place nor of time, but one whose word was to their hearts, and to whom they could not be disloyal if they would?

From this point on we find Ezekiel preaching to the people a vastly different type of sermon from those of the earlier period. It is now his task to comfort and to encourage and to build up hope for the future. If he could not hold this little colony faithful to Jehovah, the religion of Jehovah would perish from the earth. Ezekiel was trembling upon the edge of a doctrine which a little later became dominant, that Jehovah was God not only of the Hebrews, but of all the nations.

The attitude of the people is well put in 33:30-33. Eager to hear any word which might possibly represent a message from Jehovah, they were yet uncomprehending and unwilling to accept the philosophy of life which Ezekiel gave to them. His voice was as easily forgotten as the strains of pleasant music. The messages which the prophet was giving during these early days after the fall of Jerusalem are probably contained in chs. 25-33. They consist of denunciations of the

nations surrounding Israel, among whom there must have been great rejoicing over the fall of their ancient neighbor. They were doubtless each counting on the possession of some share of the land which had belonged to the Hebrews, and some advantage from their misfortune. They did not stop to think that the great conqueror who had ended the existence of Israel as a nation would serve them in the same way if need arose. Ezekiel's first task was to reassure the people in Babylonia as to the future of these nations. Only by helping his people to feel that Jehovah was in control of the situation, and that these nations also were in his power, could the prophet hope to keep alive a desire to return to Palestine and set up a new kingdom, and to him it was inconceivable that Jehovah should not eventually return his people to their own land. The chief interest in these messages to the nations is in the very vivid picture given us of social and commercial conditions. Read particularly the chapters relating to Tyre, 26, 27, and 28. The whole social and commercial world of ancient times is spread out there for us to see—the merchants and their wares, the shipping, the religious customs, the houses, the way of living, clearly and beautifully pictured. Chs. 29–32, concerning Egypt, are not so picturesque, and ch. 32 ends with a summary of the whole section.

Read chapter 34, an address which is full of comfort for the humiliated and heartsick people who were now bearing the brunt of the scorn of the world and of their brethren in Babylon as well, at least such of the latter as were now ready to fling in the faces of the newly arrived captives former claims of superiority over the people who had been first carried away. Jehovah, says the prophet to the despairing, will save his people as a shepherd, but he will judge between sheep and sheep. And here, as in old Jerusalem, the prophet insisted that upon conduct and loyalty rested the claim of nation or individual to the protection of Jehovah.

Undoubtedly the people who suffered most during all this time were those who had been faithful to Jehovah, and who became more and more heartsick as they grew old in captivity with no prospect of a return, and saw their children growing up with not even the desire for a home in Palestine. Read chapter 37, which is a sermon directed to just this difficulty. The thought is, Do not despair for Jehovah has the power to restore even dead and dried up bones and make of them living spirits. He will bring the children of Israel from the nations among which they are scattered to their own land, and revive them as a nation where they shall always be his people, and he will be their God. The philosophy of it all, in Ezekiel's thought, is given in 39:21–29. 'For her iniquity Israel was carried away from her land, but her punishment is over: she shall go back to her former home, conscious of her sins, and devoting herself henceforth to the service of her God, having learned his way of life and resolved to walk in it, and the nations, seeing, shall understand.

We have already seen that Ezekiel was endowed with a wonderful imagination. Chapters 40–48 of his book are devoted entirely to an imaginary reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem. We can hardly believe that Ezekiel himself was thinking

of this description as in any sense a working plan for the new Jerusalem. He was, however, embodying in this imaginary picture a spiritualized conception of a city in which everything was perfect in the external form and in its usefulness, because it was God-made and God-directed. Its borders were ample for all who had the right to dwell therein. Its government was ideal, worship was joyful and acceptable, and, more than all, in some sense it was sure to come to pass, if loyalty and righteousness could be secured. With hopes such as these, Ezekiel doubtless was able to hold together a considerable portion of the Hebrew community of Babylonia. The prophet himself, however, must have died long before the end of that captivity.

There is a certain religious exclusiveness about Ezekiel which was perhaps the result of his priestly training as a young man, and of a somewhat aristocratic temperament. There is little indication in his book of the political changes which were taking place in Babylon, the assassination of the king in 558, and the succession in one year of three different kings, 554 B.C.

We have noted in our study of Ezekiel that the great majority of his speeches seem to be complete. We have also observed a unity in his book which was not found in the other books of the prophets. Moreover there is little question in regard to his authorship of the whole book; it falls into systematic divisions and can be assigned to definite periods.

### ISAIAH 40-66

We now turn to another book in regard to which there are many problems. We have already studied the first thirty-nine chapters of the Book of Isaiah, which might more properly be called "Isaiah of Jerusalem." We are now to take up the remaining chapters, 40-66, of this book, which very clearly belong to the period of the captivity, and a portion of which, at least, we may call "Isaiah of Babylonia." This book, however, seems to be a collection of the utterances of a great prophet living in the captivity, to which have been added from time to time utterances of later prophets scattered over a period of many years, and reflecting conditions existing in the community of the returned, rather than in Babylonia. We shall take up first, and treat most fully, the chapters relating to the work of the prophet in Babylon. We shall note at once that his messages are in poetic form. They are, in fact, some of the most beautiful poems in all Old Testament literature.

This Isaiah began to preach somewhere between the date 545, when Cyrus the Great after defeating Croesus, the wealthy king of Lydia in Asia Minor, after that the Greek colonies, as king of Persia and the great empire of the Medes pushed his conquest as far as the Aegean Sea, and 538 B.C., when he entered Babylon.

Although in the teaching of the prophets the conception of Jehovah had expanded inestimably in the days of the Babylonian captivity, it was still their idea that he would continue his relationship with his people in their own land,

through a restoration of the people and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. As the years passed by, however, and no prospect of return appeared, and as the people became more and more attached to the soil, as one might say, in Babylon, where their earthly goods were accumulating, and their children being born and growing into manhood and womanhood, of necessity the idea of a return to Jerusalem became less and less attractive. The city of Jerusalem was in ruins and overrun by unassimilated populations which had straggled in from north, south, east, and west. The walls were still fallen, the temple of Jehovah no longer existed.

Any prophet in these times who desired to keep alive in the hearts of the people loyalty to the old land and a desire to return to it had a difficult task before him. This, however, was the task which Isaiah of Babylon took upon himself, not without reason, other than the conviction of his own soul, for, in the onward march of Cyrus, it was not difficult for men of keen insight into political affairs, to surmise that before long Babylonia would fall to the lot of Cyrus. It was already a matter of current knowledge that the policy of Cyrus toward conquered nations was to return imported people to their own lands, and to build up these portions of his empire through the people to whom they naturally belonged. To Isaiah, therefore, it seemed not only possible, but probable, that Cyrus would become the agent of Jehovah in the deliverance of his people from their captivity in Babylon, and their return to Jerusalem and Palestine.

If we recall that most of the older generation of people who had come down into Babylon from Jerusalem had died in the natural course of events, and that the Jewish population in Babylon was now chiefly the second generation, we shall realize what a task the prophet had before him, for surely Babylon was a more attractive place, even to a subject people, than Jerusalem in its present condition. It could only be restored to a semblance of its former glory by many years of labor and sacrifice.

The speeches of Isaiah are more easily understood if read in stanzas, recalling that in Hebrew poetry there is a relationship of lines in pairs, the second line presenting an antithesis, a synthesis, or a repetition, which relates it to the first line. Read Isaiah 40:1-11, a wonderful message of comfort which we may well feel was addressed to the older members of the community who were confident of the fact that their captivity in Babylon was a punishment for past sins. Begin new stanzas with vs. 1, 3, 6, 9, and 10.

If we remember that as long as the Hebrew people lived in Palestine their sense of God was local and limited, and that they could not easily think of him as superior to place and time, we must believe that it was only the religious leaders who had yet grasped the thought of Jehovah as the creator and ruler of the world. In prosperous Babylon it must have often seemed to the Jews that the Babylonian gods were powerful, and no doubt some of them had gone so far as to worship them. The prophet undertakes therefore to reassure those who are loyal to Jehovah in regard to the greatness of their God, and to persuade some



who might already have abandoned him to return. Our next passage is found in Isaiah 40:12-31. Between vs. 19 and 20, however, we will insert 41:6, 7, a little fragment which seems to have become in some way misplaced. The beginning of stanzas may be marked as follows: vs. 12, 13, 15, 18, 21, 23, 25, 27, 30, remembering, of course, to put the fragment 41:6, 7 between 19 and 20 as a part of the same stanza.

It is clear that the purpose of this poem or address is to give an overwhelming sense of the greatness of Jehovah as compared with the images which were worshiped by the Babylonians, representing their gods. Could those who heard fail to say to themselves, Cannot this great Jehovah who created the universe and who brings out the stars in order, night by night, be relied upon for so simple a task as to care for his people and to direct their destiny?

Read now 41:1-5. As you read, think of Cyrus in the background, news of his conquests continually coming to the Jews, as well as to the Babylonians. No true Hebrew prophet could think otherwise than that Cyrus was the agent of Jehovah, and that good to his people would come from this universal upheaval. Vs. 21-29 of the same chapter call upon the Babylonians to bring out their idols and to challenge them to discover if one of them was ever able to interpret past history or to predict what was to come. Isaiah asserts that Jehovah, from the beginning, had directed history, and that in the words which he had spoken through his prophets from time to time coming events were indicated. 44:6-8 sums up the thought of the prophet, "besides Jehovah there is no God." It is easy for us to say, "of course not," but remember that the prophet and his people were surrounded by worshipers of other gods, and that up to this time Babylonia had prospered, and was indeed the mistress of the world. It was a daring enterprise to speak of her apparently successful gods as senseless images.

Read 42:24, 25, and 43:1-7. Again we find the prophet in this passage assuring the people that although they had been brought down into captivity because of their sins, the process was one of burning out their sins, of redeeming the people, but now that was accomplished and the glorious future was just ahead. Add to this passage vs. 21-23 of ch. 44.

It was in October, 538 B.C., that Cyrus turned toward Babylon, and aided by dissatisfaction within the city entered it practically without resistance, banished the king, and within a month was in full possession of the city. Read 45:1-7 12, 13, the interpretation of his coming by the prophet of Jehovah.

But now that through the generous and religiously tolerant policy of Cyrus, the privilege of return to their native land was extended to the exiles, and they were even to be allowed to take back to Jerusalem the plunder of their former conquerors, how many of them were ready to undertake the long, arduous journey and to spend years in the rebuilding of the ruined city, already inhabited by a small, struggling population of a mixed character? How easy it is to imagine the discussion of the matter among the Jews themselves. How few there would be



who would be enthusiastically in favor of the return. So many skeptical questions would be raised; and how the young people would clamor to remain in Babylon where they had been born and had lived their lives! The way must be made to appear easy to them, and the nation pictured as restored to Jerusalem with a multitude of inhabitants. Read 48:12-21 and 49:16-23. There were those, of course, who said it is impossible, we can never do it. Read 51:1-16, in which the prophet calls upon the witness of their past history to encourage them. In 52:1-12, he sings a song to Jerusalem, calling upon her to rejoice, for her trials are ended. Vs. 11 and 12 are spoken to the people to encourage them to do their part in fulfilling this promise to Jerusalem.

We now come to a group of chapters which are peculiarly interesting, for they indicate that the prophet had in mind something greater than merely the restoration of Israel to her home land, and the rebuilding of the nation. To him the nation was the servant of Jehovah, with a mission to perform to all the world, and the experience through which she had been passing was training which was necessary in order that she might perform this great service. These are known as the "servant passages." Read 49:1-6, culminating in the statement that Israel is to be a light not only to the tribes of Jacob, but to the Gentiles, and that her teachings shall reach to the end of the earth, bringing salvation to all the world. Read 42:1-7, which tells us that this salvation shall be teaching in truth, and deliverance to the blind, the prisoner, and all those who sit in darkness. Also that the law of Jehovah and the teaching of his servant shall give "breath to the people and spirit to them that walk in his way."

Chapter 52:13-53:12 is one section. It begins with the promise of the exaltation of the servant and the surprise with which the nations shall behold it. 52:13-15; 53:1-3 the reason that they had not recognized in the despised and stricken people, one who should be exalted. Vs. 4, 5 sense the fact that the faithful were suffering because of the sins of others, and v. 6 confesses those sins and the responsibility of all for the suffering of the faithful. Vs. 7, 8, 9 recount the devotion and the meekness of spirit of the "servant." V. 10 claims that this is all part of the plan of Jehovah, and vs. 11, 12 bring us back again to the exaltation of the servant of Jehovah. Although no doubt the prophet had in mind the despised, forsaken, and humiliated nation, upon which he believed there rested the responsibility of teaching the world about Jehovah, the picture is so vivid that it is frequently interpreted as the experience of an individual, and generations have come to see in this picture of humiliation and self-sacrifice the very person of Christ. At all events, whatever we may have in mind in reading this passage, we have here a wonderful suggestion of the reward of vicarious suffering, and the mystery of life out of death. This is one of the greatest contributions of the Old Testament to religious thought and life.

We shall take time to read carefully only one more passage from this great prophet, 55:1-13. Do we find in this passage a suggestion that the religion of

Jehovah gives everyone who thirsts for the living God an invitation to come and share in the inheritance of the Hebrew people?

Chapters 55-66 can best be read as collections of prophetic statements, or poems, all looking forward to some glorious future for the nation, and doubtless reflecting from time to time the disappointment of the Hebrews in the material results of the Return, of which we shall have more to say in a subsequent study.

It would be a good thing to read at this point a collection of poems reflecting the thought of some other of Israel's poets concerning the siege and fall of Jerusalem, the Book of Lamentations. There was an old tradition that this book was written by Jeremiah, but it betrays many characteristics not found elsewhere in the writings of Jeremiah. It is more probable that perhaps except for his contribution of a single poem, this book is a collection of poems, rather than the work of a single author. However, that is a minor matter. Our interest lies in the poems themselves, and the help which they give us in appreciating the feelings of the people in this period.

How can we now sum up the product of our study of the books which we have this month reviewed?

1. Do we not realize that we should have been poor indeed, if we had found in our Bible those older chronicles recording in detail the acts of Israel's rulers and giving us no religious interpretation of them? It is only the great trend of history and the spiritual product which in the long run counts for the human race, and that is what the biblical writers have given us.

2. Perhaps, however, the greatest impression of our work will remain in a keen appreciation of the way in which God revealed himself to men in the processes of history, and the fact that the deepest revelation comes out of the greatest human extremity. Out of the religious experiences of Ezekiel and the second Isaiah in circumstances such as seemed to the spectator the very death of the nation and their religion, came purer faith, more consecrated motives, and an assurance of God as universal and omnipotent without which religion could not have moved forward.

We ourselves are living in a time when religion is again being tested and tried. Will the world's experience in these later days result in an enlarged appreciation of God upon the basis of which religion will become more effective? Today as in the days of Isaiah the answer depends upon ourselves, as individuals for society is only an aggregation of individuals.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the general character of the Books of Kings?
2. What kind of history may they be termed?
3. The religious views of what group of people do they reflect?
4. Of the work of what great prophets do they give us our only knowledge?
5. From what earlier books were the records drawn, and what period of the nation's history do they cover?

6. Who was Ezekiel? Where and at what time was his work done?
7. By what peculiarities was his method of work characterized?
8. What event in the history of the Hebrew people came early in his career?
9. How did he seek to prepare the people for it?
10. After the fall of Jerusalem, in what way did the purpose of his preaching change?
11. How did the Hebrews in Babylonia regard him?
12. What were some of the great ideas which he contributed to the Jehovah religion?
13. Who was the other great prophet during the exile?
14. How had the situation changed since Ezekiel's times, and what new task had Isaiah?
15. With what forms of opposition was he likely to meet?
16. Give some of the arguments with which he strove to convince the people of the purpose of God concerning them, and his power to perform it.
17. Contrast the literary form of the Book of Ezekiel and that of the second Isaiah.
18. Name some of the great ideas about God which seem to have been crystallized in the work of Isaiah.
19. What great historical personages and events were interpreted by the prophet as showing the hand of God?
20. What new ideas about the mission of the people did he emphasize?
21. Was his contribution of permanent value?
22. Has history confirmed his interpretation of the mission of the Jews to the world? Are Christians always ready to acknowledge their debt?

NOTE—The book of Obadiah, containing one chapter of anathema against Edom may have come from this period although estimates of its place in the chronology of Israel's literature vary 600 years.

## STUDY VIII

## A GROUP OF POST-EXILIC BOOKS

HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, MALACHI, I, II CHRONICLES, EZRA,  
NEHEMIAH, LEVITICUS, RUTH, ESTHER, JOEL, JONAH

HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, AND MALACHI

After our study of the work of the great prophets of the Exile, we turn eagerly to that land to which the prophets had so confidently expected that the people would return. We might justly expect that from this period on the history of the people would be more systematically recorded as a result of contact with the broader culture and more highly developed civilization of the Babylonians. As a matter of fact, definitely historical records practically ceased. A group of books, however, partly from prophets and partly based upon personal memoirs, gives us glimpses at widely separated intervals, of life in Jerusalem and a small surrounding area, and these, with the addition of a certain book of ceremonial law, help us in some measure to understand the religious ideals and practices of the times.

We shall begin our study with three short books of the speeches of prophets—Haggai and Zechariah, written (reckoning the date by the year of Darius, who succeeded to the throne of Persia in 521 B.C.) in 520 to 518 B.C., and the book of Malachi, the third of the group, possibly written a few years later.

We do not know when a special group of Hebrews had come from Babylon, whether in large or small numbers, or whether the population of Jerusalem at the time these three books were written was largely the people who had gradually drifted in from nearby sections through all the years of the captivity, but we are able to see in the prophetic addresses, a reflection of the poverty of the land and the meagerness of the life of the people. Up to this time no temple had been erected to Jehovah since the destruction of the old temple by Nebuchadnezzar. It is this fact which troubles the prophets Haggai and Zachariah. Read Haggai, ch. 1, and see how the prophet appeals to the people to compare with their own comfortable houses the thus far useless foundation of the house of Jehovah. There had apparently been an earlier effort to build a temple, but the work had been abandoned, or possibly the reference is to old foundations which had not been destroyed. Notice, vs. 5-11, that the prophet attributes the failure of the crops and general poverty to this neglect of Jehovah's house. Vs. 12-15 picture the response of the people under the leadership of their governor and Joshua, the son of the high priest. Read 2:1-3, which indicates that the prospective glories of this temple seem to the people insignificant. We gather from the remainder of ch. 2 that the people were loath to go on toward the building of a temple which

they knew would fall so far short of those of the old temple, but they were encouraged by Joshua to believe that Jehovah himself would come and bless and glorify the house so that it would be greater even than the former one. The emphasis of the book is to the effect that the building of the Temple is essential to the favor of Jehovah and the fulfilment of his promises of prosperity.

Turning to Zechariah, note the date of his prophecy, 1:1, and the words of encouragement to the builders of the temple, vs. 7-17. Bear in mind that the people were living without strong political organization, simply as a religious community, bound together by ties of blood and a common religious faith that the day of Jehovah would soon come, a day in which Jehovah would redeem the promises of the past to his chosen people. Zechariah's message takes the form of visions. Note 2:1-5, in which he pictures a wall of fire protecting the city, now open to the encroachments of marauders on every side, and vs. 6-13 in which the prophet calls on those who still remain in Babylon to hasten back to Jerusalem, where, 10-13, all will sing and rejoice together because Jehovah himself will soon be dwelling in his temple.

The note of ethical warning is not absent from the message of Zechariah. 7:8-10 is like an echo of Amos, with its emphasis upon social justice; 7:11-14, is the prophet's explanation of the disappointment of the people. In ch. 8, the prophet, with strong words of encouragement, urges the people to continue to build the house of the Lord, for which the foundations have long been waiting. It is very clear, from vs. 16, 17, that the prophet looks forward to the completion of the house of Jehovah as a greatly needed influence in keeping the people up to the ethical ideals which he is holding before them. The promises of Isaiah and Micah are clearly recalled by 8:20-23. We abandon here the study of Zechariah for chapters 9-14 are very different in character and may have been from the hand of some later unknown writer.

We have but a brief moment for the consideration of Malachi, the third of this group of prophetic books. This is not a personal name, but the word for "messenger." A rapid reading of 1:6-13 and chapter 2 clearly indicates that the prophet, whoever he was, was greatly dissatisfied with the kind of leadership in worship which the people received. He criticizes the priests severely for accepting offerings which are imperfect and contemptible, and equally condemns the people who presume to bring to Jehovah anything less than the very best. 2:17 indicates his disapproval of the perverted moral judgment of the people. Ch. 3 looks forward to the time when all these evils shall be done away, culminating in ch. 4, with an announcement of a day when all the wicked shall be separated from the righteous, the one destined for destruction and the other for healing and happiness.

The great common principle which is recognized in the preaching of these prophets of the period of the return is an abiding faith in a God who will eventually reward the righteous, make Jerusalem glorious, and the religion of Jehovah



central in the world. Circumstances were continually changing, but with each turn of the tide the prophets readjusted themselves to the situation and reasserted confidence in the future. These prophets are more inclined than their predecessors to define righteousness as worship and to connect it with the Temple and ritual, but they still stand for social justice and cannot picture to themselves a future in which Jehovah shall abide with his people except under the conditions of justice and a square deal among themselves. One cannot fail to see, back of all the chapters the hard struggle of the people for subsistence, the desolation of the city, the absorption in temporal affairs, and the disappointment in the new temple.

## I, II CHRONICLES, EZRA, NEHEMIAH

We shall now pass to another group of books which, although written many years later, give us further glimpses into the conditions which prevailed in Jerusalem in these days of the restoration when the Jews were drifting back to their own country. These books, four in number, have the aspect of history. At least they are historical in form, and give us what seems to be a connected story of the history of Israel from the days of David down to about 433 B.C., a hundred years after the conquest of Cyrus. The books are I and II Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. We shall consider first the books of Chronicles.

It will be interesting for us, first of all, to note the titles of the various books or documents to which the writer of the Chronicles, or the Chronicler, as we may call him, refers us for further information on some of the subjects which he brings into his narrative. Read I Chron. 9:1, a reference to the books of the Kings of Israel; 29:29, the history of Samuel, the seer, and the history of Nathan, the prophet, as well as the history of Gad, the seer. Read in II Chron. 16:11, reference to the book of the Kings of Judah and Israel; 27:7; 35:27; 36:8, the book of the Kings of Israel and Judah, probably the same book, but possibly not; 24:27, the Midrash of the book of the Kings; 13:22, the Midrash of the prophet Iddo. The word *Midrash* is a familiar term in late Jewish literature for something which might correspond to our modern word *commentary*, and is so translated in the standard version of the Bible. It suggests what is "searched out" or "inferred" or filled in from many sources. In II Chron. 12:15, we have reference to the history of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer. In 20:34, the history of Jehu; 9:29, the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and also the vision of Iddo, the seer, concerning Jeroboam, the son of Nebat; and in 32:32 the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos. A single glance at chs. 1-9 will also show us that large use is made of family records or genealogical tables.

We may learn a great deal about the interests of the author of the book of Chronicles by noting what he has put into his books, and comparing this with what it suited the purpose of the author of the books of Kings to preserve. Notice that the narrative in ch. 10 begins with the death of Saul. Ch. 11:1-9, gives us the impression that David was immediately proclaimed king at Hebron, and that he

eagerly and without any conflicts took command of all Israel, captured Jerusalem, and made it his capital. This is a very different impression from that which we gain from the book of II Samuel which records a period of seven years of struggle before David became king over all Israel with Jerusalem actually the capital. In chs. 13-16 we have a greatly elaborated account of the bringing up of the Ark to Jerusalem, an account in which the sons of Aaron, the Levites, the sons of Kohath, the sons of Uziah, and many other specific family groups indicate a much more elaborate organization of society, and a much greater development of ceremonial than anything which is suggested in the books of Samuel. On the other hand, compare II Sam. 8 with I Chron. 18. Here is apparently a case when the Chronicler was dependent entirely upon II Sam., or chose to use a whole section from that book. Notice I Chron. ch. 21, a reference to Satan, a term not used in early Hebrew literature. Following with the eye through the remainder of I Chron. and up to the ninth chapter of II Chron., we find that twenty-nine chapters have been devoted to the story of David and the history of Israel to the death of Solomon, and that many chapters within this section are given to a description of religious activities of a ceremonial character, such as those that relate to the Ark, to the priestly families, to the building of the temple and the appointment of officers for carrying on its services.

One would naturally expect to find in the remaining chapters of the books a history of Israel and Judah corresponding in some measure to the history in the books of Kings. On the contrary, we find a much more diffused and more interesting history of Judah alone, and only such references to the kings of Israel as had to do with their relationship to the kings of Judah. It is clear that the writer of the Chronicles was interested only in Judah, and that his primary interest even in Judah was the history of the ceremonial side of religion rather than the growth of those ethical qualities upon which the earlier prophets had laid emphasis. To take the names of kings of Judah, comparing each record as contained in the Kings and the Chronicles, is an extremely interesting task, well worth doing, for instance, such a story as that of Uziah or Azariah, king of Judah. Read II Kings 15:1-7, and II Chron. 26:1-23. In the one case we have the simple statement that Uziah (Azariah) became a leper; in the other we have an elaborate description of the occasion on which the leprosy fell upon him as a punishment for his presumption in usurping the duties of the priests. Very clearly, the latter story is written by someone who had great reverence for the sacredness of the priestly office, and the conformity of the ceremony of sacrifice to certain prescribed modes. Another very interesting narrative is the story of Hezekiah as found in II Kings 18 and 19, and in II Chron. 29 to 32. The account in II Chron. is twice as long as that in II Kings, but practically all of the extra space is given to the account of Hezekiah's relations to the Levites and the part which was given to them in the worship in the house of Jehovah, and to the celebration of a great Passover. In other words, according to the story in the books of Kings, the reformation of

Hezekiah was a matter of destroying idolatrous sanctuaries and restoring loyalty to Jehovah. In Chronicles it is largely the building up of an elaborate temple ceremonial in worship. It is easy to see, therefore, that we have in the books of Chronicles, although perhaps written some hundreds of years later than the books of Kings, more elaborate accounts and with a very different emphasis. Perhaps in the hands of the priesthood itself, there had been growing up these traditions of the relation of the priesthood to the history of Israel, added to from generation to generation in such a way that after the passage of several hundred years the entire emphasis in a narrative might have changed, so far as it was regarded by a dominating religious group.

The interesting question for us to ask here is whether the people who lived in the days when the Chronicles were written were as much interested in and satisfied with the work of the Chronicler as the people of centuries earlier had been satisfied with the work of the compiler of the books of Kings.

The story of the Chronicles closes in the first year of the reign of Cyrus, that is, approximately the end of the captivity. In the next two books the narrative is carried on to a date possibly as late as 433 B.C., which would be the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes I, or possibly to 372 B.C., the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes II, for our biblical writer does not tell us to which Artaxerxes he refers. In Neh. 13:6 you will find the reference. We do not know whether the author of the Chronicles was also the author of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, but the general style of language, except in the case of inserted documents, is very similar to that of the Chronicler, and the emphasis and general purpose seems to be identical. The documents are in Aramaic largely, and may have been copied from documents kept in the public archives in Jerusalem. Probably the source of material for these two books comes from what might be called memoirs of Ezra written by himself, and of Nehemiah, also written by himself. Extracts from these documents are inserted in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah in the form of the first person, while the writer of the books uses the third person in portions where instead of the document itself, he gives us what might be called a digest of his sources of information. As in the case of so many biblical books, there is little or no attention paid to chronology. For instance, the correspondence with Artaxerxes, whose dates are 465-425, is placed before that with Darius, whose dates are 522-485. We must, therefore, simply run through the books regarding them as interesting memorials of the time which they represent, unsystematically arranged but giving us a glimpse of some of the critical moments in the development of the thought of the Hebrews of that time, through circumstances which arose in the new city, and under the leadership of strong men who had before them a very definite ideal of the relation of the people to Jehovah, Jehovah's relation to the nations, and a great destiny which their nation was eventually to achieve.

With this introductory word of caution, let us pass to the books themselves, and read with sympathetic enjoyment the story with which the writer of the Chronicles seeks to inspire his fellow-countrymen, living centuries after the events about which he writes, to be loyal to the traditions of their fathers and to their God, with what effect we have some basis of judging when we recall the devotion to ceremonial and to the temple which was characteristic of the Jews down to the time Christ, and in some measure is seen in the religion of the Jews to the present day.

Glance through Ezra, chs. 1-3. Note the description of the great procession which was said to have come from Babylon into the new city of Jerusalem. Beginning with 3:8, we have a story of the laying of foundations for the temple, a work which we find, in ch. 4, was interrupted by difficulties with the people of the land, for we must recall that Jerusalem was already inhabited by all sorts of people who had drifted in during the years of the captivity, non-Jews as well as Jews. Ch. 4:7-24, is the story of how the king of Persia was stirred up to use his authority to stop the work on the house of God. Chs. 5 and 6 give an interesting story of how, aroused by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, with whose speeches we are already familiar, the people again commenced building a temple. When their right to do so was questioned by the governor an appeal was made to Darius, the king, which resulted in the finding of the old decree of Cyrus, which was then confirmed by Darius, and the work allowed to proceed to completion, a process of several years. The dedication was then celebrated by a great feast of the Passover.

In ch. 7 the hero of the book is introduced. Ezra, a Jewish priest and scribe living in Babylon, with his heart set upon the law of Jehovah, and a great desire to see practiced in Israel its statutes and ordinances starts for Jerusalem, bringing with him a retinue of important Jews from Babylon, whose genealogy is very carefully preserved in this document. The expedition of Ezra was authorized by Artaxerxes the king, 7:11-26. At this point Ezra takes up the narrative himself through an extract from his memoirs. The party arrives safely in Jerusalem; the treasure is delivered to the temple; the messages of state are delivered to the governor; and great burnt offerings celebrate the event. Read ch. 9, however, and note that Ezra finds difficulties. We have already observed how high an ideal he had of the separateness of the people of Jehovah, and the holiness of their relation to Jehovah. What does he now find but that the princes, priests, and even the Levites are associating with the different people who have set up their homes in the land, quite regardless of whether they were Hebrews or not. They have even gone so far as to intermarry, so that the "holy seed" had mingled itself with the blood of the people of the land. To Ezra this seems a terrible situation. He stops, as he says, confounded, until the time of the evening offering, having rent his garments and plucked out the hairs of his head and his beard



in token of his great distress. Ch. 9:5-15 records his prayer of confession on behalf of the people. Meanwhile consternation has swept through the city, and leaders among the people propose that those who have married foreign women pledge themselves to put away all these wives and the children that had been born of them. "All Judah and Jerusalem," so far as those who had been in captivity were concerned, are summoned to Jerusalem on pain of the forfeiture of all of their substance, and excommunication. Ch. 10:9-15 assures us that the people thus coerced by Ezra agreed to the separations proposed but for a few objectors, v. 15. This is but one of the many indications of the increasing consciousness of certain leaders among the Hebrew people that only in absolute separateness from all the other nations of the earth could their relation to Jehovah be preserved and his promises fulfilled. We must not forget that also there had been for centuries a growing consciousness that the nation had a mission to the world, and now the conviction grew stronger that only by maintaining its separateness could it fulfil that mission. We may well raise the question whether, if the Hebrew people had been absorbed by the surrounding nations as they were in their political weakness in great danger of being, would the religion of Jehovah have perished? Strange as it may seem, this exclusiveness which is so foreign to the Christian ideal, seems to have been in this period of the world's history essential to the preservation of the religion from which Christianity sprang.

The book of Nehemiah is a continuation, probably by the same author, of the book of Ezra. In this, also, are found memoirs written in the first person, which have a vividness that assures us that they were written when the experiences were fresh in the minds of the participants. Read rapidly chs. 1-7. In the first two chapters of this book we find Nehemiah telling us about his first visit to Jerusalem as a result of tidings which had reached him in Shushan, the Persian capital where he was one of the king's officers. The clean, fine, strong enthusiasm of Nehemiah is an inspiration to us as well as to his fellow-countrymen. Chs. 3, 4 describe the progress of the restoration of the walls of the city, in the organized fashion which was the result of Nehemiah's efforts. It gives us also a very vivid picture of the efforts of the enemies of the Jews to impede progress, and the splendid way in which Nehemiah strove to keep up the courage of his countrymen, to quell their fears, and to arrange their work so that they might have the greatest protection possible. Ch. 5 shows him concerned also with internal evils, indignant at the selfishness of some of his brethren, and full of sympathy for some who have suffered from extortion, and oppression by their own people. He himself sets a noble example by lending money to those who need it, and trying to rearrange the taxes in such a way that the very poor would have an opportunity to get their affairs on a comfortable basis. He ends by telling us that through all the period of his governorship, he lived at his own expense, not only for himself but for his expensive household of state as well. In chapter 6



we find him refusing even to confer with the surrounding peoples who were trying to prevent the building of the walls, and taking measures by which he can increase the population within the city and so make it more able to defend itself.

Chs. 8-10 bring Ezra again into the story. Written in the third person, they describe a great religious assembly in which Ezra reads to the people the law. The section ends with the acceptance of the law by the people, a covenant sealed by a long list of representative men. This law, the character of which may be surmised from ch. 10, largely relates to ceremonial worship. It implies a deep sense of sin and the necessity for a method by which that sin can be set aside and sinners restored to the favor of God. The Levites are conspicuous in the chapter, and the priests and temple officers are most important functionaries.

Ch. 12 tells us about the dedication of the walls, accompanied by elaborate ceremonies, and ch. 13 gives us the information that Nehemiah having returned to his Persian home again visits Jerusalem to see how things are going. He is not satisfied with what he finds. He discovers that social reforms cannot be carried through in a day, and by force. We are again reminded of the difficulties through which the Jews were kept apart from other nations, and a unit maintained, loyal to Jehovah, through which the Jehovah religion was transmitted to later generations. Only the work of certain inspired leaders accomplished it.

In our study of the period of Jeremiah, we found a law book which we identified with at least a portion of the book of Deuteronomy. The question arises, is it possible to identify elsewhere in our Bible the book or portions of it which Ezra read to the people? If this had been something with which they had been entirely familiar, would it have made such an impression upon them? May it not have been, as in the days of Jeremiah, a new writing of the old law, with adaptations to the present situation? Bearing in mind the emphasis throughout the books of Chronicles and Nehemiah upon the priesthood, upon the temple ceremonial, the idea of the sin of the people, and the holiness of Jehovah, and the difficulties which the people had in maintaining their worship and keeping themselves apart from other nations, might we not expect to find in this law full treatment of these subjects? Suppose we turn to the book of Leviticus and see what we find there. If we were to attempt to read this book through, we should find it a very tedious matter. It is repetitious, formal, and deals exclusively with things which are outside of our present civilization, so that we can scarcely hold our attention upon them. It has no story element to speak of. It is legalistic throughout. It gives us the sense of being a manual for priests rather than a law for the people, for no people could easily keep in mind the multitudinous regulations and conditions that are imposed by this book. Read through the headings at the tops of the pages, and you will get a very good idea of the character of the contents. Chs. 8-10 recount the consecration of the priests and their entry upon

their office. Chs. 11-15 give us laws of purification and atonement about which we did not hear in the earlier laws of Israel, and chs. 17-26 contain what is frequently called "the law of holiness." In ch. 23 of this law we find a calendar of different feasts, many of which had not been observed before this period. The whole book presupposes a God of extreme holiness, distant, unapproachable except by a consecrated and holy priesthood.

What is our general conclusion in regard to this book and all these evidences of priestly activity which we have been noting? It is chiefly that Israel had ceased to place her confidence in a political organization which would give freedom from the domination of other nations. In other words having ceased to exist as an independent state they accepted their fate, but their old sense of dominance and a great future was not destroyed. It only changed its form. Henceforth, as a religious community under a supervision by priests more rigorous than any political régime which they had ever endured, they built their dreams upon the basis of a religious community in which might be developed a kind of life which would invite the presence of Jehovah, and enable him to fulfill his promises of world-dominion, and world-instruction through his people.

May we go back now for a few moments hastily to review the narratives of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers, noting some of those things which we omitted in our original study of these books. We note in Gen. 5 an important genealogical table; 6:9-22, a story of the ark which culminates in a covenant and regulations in regard to food; again 11:10-27, more genealogies; 17, the entire chapter devoted to another covenant and the sign of circumcision established as something which will forever keep the people apart from their fellow-men; 27:46-28:9, the story of the care of Isaac and Rebecca with reference to the marriage of their son. If we were to continue our examination carefully, we would come frequently upon just such chapters scattered throughout the three books mentioned. But the most striking example is Exod. 25-40, in which we find all of the chapters devoted to a description of elaborate religious ceremonials said to have been carried on in the wilderness wanderings. Detailed descriptions of the ark and a wonderful tabernacle are also given. In other stories of the wilderness, and the earlier patriarchal life, we find no correspondence with this formal, highly developed type of religious worship, where priests and orders and the minutest detail of sacrifice are described and prescribed. The same sort of phenomenon is seen in many of the chapters of Numbers, with only here and there one of the simple stories which we have in other parts of Genesis and Exodus. You will also easily recall that the same attitude toward history, the same atmosphere of formal worship, organized priesthood, and attention to elaborate detail, even extending to such matters as the conquest of cities, appeared in the book of Joshua 3:2-8; ch. 6.

Putting together therefore our experience in the study of the extended history contained in Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, we judge that in this later period

of Israel's history, the same task was undertaken as that of an earlier prophetic period, namely the re-writing of Israel's history from the beginning and the recodification of her laws. This time, the emphasis was not so much upon justice and mercy and the ethical aspects of the Jehovah religion, as upon ceremonial matters relating to the community and the temple worship. In other words, the religious leaders of these times undertook to reorganize religious life and social relationships in such a way as to promote the welfare of a *holy people, devoted to a holy God, expressing their religious life in sacrifice, in repentance represented by offerings, and in a humility before God which was prescribed in every detail*. Would this result in the separation of the people from God as too holy to be approached, or in a fanaticism which would make all life a devotion to ritual, or would God working in the hearts of men lead them to religious freedom while preserving in perilous days a devotion to him upon which it could be built. Back of all this new formalism was the leadership of earnest, sincere, and noble men, who, interpreting literally the past promises of Jehovah, sought to forcibly bring into existence a kind of life which would merit his favor. The difficulty was that they were dealing with human beings and not with machines, and in the hearts of human beings there was developing a consciousness of a personal relation to Jehovah which tended toward freedom and away from the bondage of ritual.

### RUTH AND ESTHER

At this point it is very interesting to take up the study of a little book which is placed in the Bible back among the books which treat of a very early period, that of the Judges. The book of Ruth gives us an old story or tradition in a charming literary form. It presents the story of a Moabitish damsel, the wife of a Hebrew man, who, becoming a widow in the land of Moab, where her husband had married her, accompanies her husband's mother back to the ancient Hebrew home of her family. There she is well received, and, loyal to the memory of her Hebrew husband, claims the benefit of the old next-of-kin law in regard to marriage and the rearing of children to a former husband. To the ordinary reader, the climax comes when this favorable marriage is consummated, but to the Hebrew the climax must be at the end when a son is born. To the Hebrews of the late period when mixed marriages were under condemnation, the climax would be still another fact—this son of a mixed marriage only two generations removed, was David, the king, who was still the ideal of kingship in Israel. Here, indeed, is a tract for the times, which might easily have been written by one of those very men whose marriage to a non-Hebrew woman has been condemned. We have an indication here that there were strong thinkers in old Israel, and that the struggle for freedom had ethical qualities in it, as well as the struggle for ritual.

Because we have no better place in which to put it, we will also take up here the book of Esther, the story of a beautiful Hebrew woman and her life at the court of the Persian king. Read the book simply as a beautiful story, what we might in modern phrase call a romance. It strongly reflects, however, the hatred of the Gentiles by the Jews, and the confidence that Jehovah would always interfere on behalf of the Jews in any crisis. True, the name of God is not mentioned in this book, but one cannot escape from the feeling that it is in a divine providence that the Jews put their trust in this emergency—a providence which had made Esther queen for this particular service. The basis of this story is not known. It may have been borrowed from some other literature and Hebraized, or it may have had some basis in an actual historical occurrence which has been idealized, as history is so frequently idealized in the historical novel. It should be borne in mind, however, that the sympathy of the reader goes out to Esther and to Mordecai and their people in this book, not because of any great virtue on their part, but simply because they are Jews, and that the Gentiles are pictured as vindictive and criminal in their attitude toward the Jews. The feast of Purim, the establishment of which to celebrate the deliverance of the Jews is recorded in the ninth chapter of the book, is said to have been a feast taken over from the Persians, and there are those who believe that this book was written as a justification for the adoption of a Gentile feast into the ritual of the Jews. This was not, strictly speaking, a religious feast, but was a time for the giving of gifts and general rejoicing. It is very commonly observed among the Jews today.

### JOEL AND JONAH

We must not feel, in the study of the books which form our work for the present month, that we are dealing with a particular short period. Our study is scattered over two or three hundred years. We have no means of definitely dating many of the books of these later days. We can only observe trends of thought and general surroundings, political and social.

We began our work with a group of prophets. Let us close this study with a glance at two more prophetic books, probably coming out of a very much later period than the work of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. In the book of Joel there are but three chapters, but once having read them they stand out in our memory with great vividness. Read 1:1-4, and note that the occasion of this book is a visitation of locusts not uncommon in oriental countries. The different names probably refer to locusts in different stages of development. Read vs. 5-12, describing the devastation which the locusts have made, and calling upon the people, the husbandmen who cultivate the fields, and the priests who offer the meal offering and the drink offered alike to mourn over the frightful condition. Vs. 13 and 14 call for the proclamation of a great fast, a solemn assembly for the purpose of crying out to Jehovah for relief. Vs. 15-20 seem to indicate that



this plague of locusts is also accompanied by a severe drought, withering the grain, preventing the seeds from sprouting, devouring the pasture, and drying up the brooks. Suffering is widespread and unrelieved. Indeed, this may be the day of Jehovah, which has now come to have a terror about it which is inescapable, the inevitable result of a very deep sense of sin which prevailed through all the thought of the religious leaders of a certain school in this period. Read 2:1-11. What is the relief from this situation? The proclamation of fasting, mourning, heartrending repentance. For what? Evidently not for those social sins which the earlier prophets bewailed, but for the failure to please Jehovah in matters of worship. Only the deepest repentance accompanied by ritual ceremonies, on a vast scale will change the situation. Priests and ministers must weep and pray to Jehovah, 2:12-20, in order that the land, barren and desolate, may be restored, and grain, wine, and oil again be available. Vs. 21-27 call upon the people to rejoice in Jehovah, their God, as though relief had already come, for the certainty of rain and deliverance from the locust scourge is as great as though the deliverances had already been fulfilled. Vs. 28-32 promise that the time of deliverance shall be not only salvation from physical ills, but a time of wonderful outpouring of the spirit, in which prophecy shall no longer be confined to a select few, but all men shall possess the gift of prophecy. But even more satisfactory to the growing conservatism of a certain group among the Hebrews is the message of ch. 3, in which all the nations in the world are pictured as coming to the valley of Jehoshaphat, not to join themselves with the Jews in peaceful living, but to meet their destruction at the hand of Jehovah, when his great and terrible day shall come, a day in which the sun and the moon are darkened and the stars withdraw their shining. But when that terrible day of carnage comes, when the nations of the earth shall be trodden under foot by Jehovah, Jehovah shall be a refuge to his people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel. They shall dwell in safety, with no strangers in their midst.

One wonders out of what depths of agony the Jews of this period came to enjoy a picture of themselves, alone on the earth with their God, in a reign of peace because all other nations had been wiped out of existence. Does it not reflect the attitude of those whose conservatism was growing and deepening, who were not able to solve the problem of existence in a world of nations, and whose doctrine of Jehovah as the God of the Jews alone was inadequate to meet the needs of the situation without some such terrible end as that which is pictured in the book of Joel?

It is with relief that we turn to a little book which represents a far different point of view, and helps us to get a glimmering of how eventually, the hard shell of ritualism and conservatism was shaken off a century later. This book is but a symptom, but it is rightly named the gospel of the Old Testament. The book of Jonah presents a series of episodes, all miraculous, all concerned with one man,



the hero of the book, each in its own way, repeating the lesson of the book. We do not need to raise the question as to whether Jonah was a historical character or not. It would do us no particular good to identify him with the Jonah mentioned in II Kings 14:25. He is a lay figure upon which the author of the book drapes his story, or in modern terms he preaches a sermon to which we shall find a text at the end of the book. Read ch. 1 and note that the author reminds you that Jonah was confident that Jehovah was purely a Palestinian God, for, v. 3, he expects, by going on a trip to Tarshish, to escape from the presence of Jehovah. But has not Jehovah already proved himself to be the God of the natural world? Read vs. 4-9, in which Jonah himself acknowledges that Jehovah is the God of the heavens and the sea and the dry land. How easy to account for the storm on the sea. Even the heathen sailors are ready to acknowledge Jehovah and to offer sacrifices to him, which, and here is the point of the story, Jehovah accepts and testifies his acceptance by the quelling of the storm.

The second story begins in 1:17. It would be quite as effective if we were to read 1:17, 2:1, and 2:10, but with a different ideal of literary values, the author has inserted here a psalm or excerpts from several psalms, seeing nothing incongruous in Jonah, in these stately words, reasoning with Jehovah out of the belly of the fish. It may be that this psalm was inserted by a later hand. The point is the same in any case. Jonah, a disobedient prophet, who had refused to carry out the commission of Jehovah, suffering a just punishment, cries out to Jehovah for help, and is saved. Thus in his own experience, the prophet is made to feel the joy of being saved from destruction. The third story, ch. 3 shows the repentant prophet, obedient to a second command of Jehovah, but, miracle of miracles, his proclamation is not fulfilled because the people of Nineveh, one and all, man and beast, turn to Jehovah and cry out to him. Jehovah refuses to do the thing that he had said that he would do, and saves the great heathen city from destruction. Ch. 4 shows us Jonah upbraiding Jehovah because of such fickleness, which he claims that he might have expected, for he had known that Jehovah was merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness. But he still hopes that disaster may come to the city and his reputation as a prophet be saved. He enters upon a watch outside the city gate, sulky and defiant. Through another miracle Jehovah ministers to his physical comfort by preparing a gourd to protect him from the sultry winds. In the morning, when a miraculous worm has eaten the gourd Jonah is still angry, and considers the death of the gourd another erratic manifestation of Jehovah's power. The book closes with a marvelous rebuke, which can only be interpreted as the confident belief of some great soul that Jehovah includes in his protecting care, not only Jews, but any human souls who turn to him for protection and guidance.

We have a way of talking in these modern times about bombshells thrown into conservative camps in the field of thought. How many times in the progress

of history have we found that some short essay, political or religious tract, written or spoken by one man, yet in reality the crystallization of some widespread discontent or growing idealism, has marked an epoch in the thought of nations or the world. May it not be that this book of Jonah is the crystallization of just such a religious ideal, not yet strong enough to stand up against the organized conservatism of the community, but paving the way to progress and freedom and a conception of a world-God in whose interest and care all humanity had an equal share?

How shall we sum up our reflections upon the period which we have just studied? Do we not see, first of all and above all, how the purposes of God are, in a word, timeless? The personal intercourse of man with the Heavenly Father was always a possibility, and always the purpose of God. A matter of three or four hundred years represented the coming and going of many generations, but the development of such an idea in the minds of men who were so far from it as the people of Ezra's time required no less than this. Shall we then consider as one of the products of our work a realization of the far-reaching purposes of God?

Do we on the other hand see men devising plans which at the moment seem to be the only effectual means of accomplishing an end, yet destined to be temporary and in a sense mistaken? But, in the providence of God, these provisions, limited as they are, become the very materials through which he works, thus glorifying honest human endeavor which has for its aim harmony with the purposes of God.

Again, in a period when the apparent current is flowing rapidly in the direction of extreme conservatism, the forces of freedom are nevertheless working and liable at any moment to burst the shell of current thought and start great new channels for the ideals of men reaching out toward God.

Again—a far more serious consideration—do we not see that it is possible to delay the progress of the revelation of God to man even for centuries? The closed mind is an effectual barrier to new and dynamic thinking. Eventually the open mind is a necessity for any further revelation of God to man.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Enumerate here all the portions of the Bible which you have read in connection with this study, whether required or not.
2. With what century is this study concerned?
3. Where is the scene of the book laid?
4. Describe some of the conditions existing in Jerusalem during the period after the return, social, political, and religious.
5. Give some reasons for concluding that the books of Chronicles are not so reliable as history of the early years of Israel and Judah as the books of Kings.
6. Name two great heroes of the period of the return.
7. Give some evidence for the view that in this period all of Israel's history from the beginning was recast, and recolored by the priestly spirit of the time.

8. What was Ezra's great contribution to the life of the community in Jerusalem?
9. What social conditions did he find there which made him feel even more deeply the necessity of a rigid ceremonial law?
10. What was Nehemiah's relation to the community?
11. What was accomplished through the wisdom and sagacity of Nehemiah?
12. Upon what sort of sources are the books of Ezra and Nehemiah based?
13. How do we distinguish this original material from the remainder of the book?
14. What relation has the book of Ruth to this period?
15. What relation has the book of Leviticus to it?
16. What have you to say concerning the book of Esther?
17. Give the message of the book of Jonah.
18. Suggest the type of person in Judah who might have given expression to this book.
19. Has ritual a real function in the expression of the religious life? If so, what is it?

## STUDY IX

## RITUAL, APOCALYPSE AND PROBLEM BOOKS

THE PSALMS, THE PROVERBS, JOB, HABAKKUK,  
SONG OF SONGS, ECCLESIASTES, DANIEL

## THE PSALMS

In our last studies we have been concerned with the growing interest in ritual and in religious activities which centered in the temple. We are thus brought to the consideration of a book which is of the greatest importance in connection with the worship of the temple, the Book of Psalms. In this period of revival in the worship of Jehovah when the ceremonial laws were recast, and all the activities of life reorganized in such a way as to be the medium of religious expression, we can hardly imagine that the leaders of Israel accepted from the past a heritage of hymns or psalms which were not carefully revised, a revision which may have meant the elimination of some old psalms and the introduction of new ones which had not before belonged to the temple ritual. This new and revised hymnbook of the second temple we have in the Book of Psalms. The work of revision, however, was not one which closed the Psalter. We in our own day are continually getting out new editions of hymnals and adding or subtracting hymns. So doubtless there are Psalms in the Psalter which were added at a much later date as a result of a continuous process of revision down through the centuries.

Let us now examine the book to see what marks we can find of origin, or what indication that any of the Psalms originated in the troubled experiences of the Exile or the return, or in the earlier days of simpler religious ideas.

Before we can intelligently examine the Psalms, we must recall the characteristics of Hebrew poetry. In place of the rhyme and rhythm which mark modern poetry, we find what may be termed a rhythm of thought; that is, the thoughts of the lines in a Psalm are related to each other usually in couplets. This relation is of three special types of what we call parallelism: the synonymous parallelism, in which the second line repeats the thought of the first but in other words; the synthetic parallelism, in which the thought of the first line is incomplete, but is further developed in the second line; the antithetic parallelism in which the thought of the second line is the opposite of the thought in the first line. Unless one understands this characteristic of Hebrew poetry, it is useless to try to paraphrase the thought, for one will always be seeking to find new meanings rather than repetitions

or antitheses. It will be well worth while to examine a number of Psalms to find at least ten examples of each of these forms of parallelism. The process is interesting and discovers to us the wonderful vocabulary of the psalmist, and his ability to state the same thought in different forms. After this exercise one is able quickly to recognize the parallelism and to be prepared to re-express the thought of the couplet in a single phrase. One would not wish to rob the Psalter of its beauty by translating all its couplets into prose statements, and yet this is a very helpful process in the study of individual Psalms, the thought of which may be expressed in as many phrases as there are couplets or sometimes in two or three sentences.

Of course it will be seen at once that since we are to study a book of poetry, we should have that book in poetic form. The King James Version of the Bible does not observe this poetic form. It is therefore especially necessary that we should in this connection use the American Standard Revised Version of the Bible, or some other which fully recognizes the poetic form.

It would be a good plan for us to ask ourselves at this point what sort of poetry lives through the centuries, for we realize that the Psalms serve as an expression of personal religious feeling to Christians today, twenty centuries after they were written. It must be, therefore, that in this religious poetry there are elements of universal religious feeling. Shall we not however also expect to find in the Psalter a reflection of the status of religious thinking in the days of the second temple? It is easy to see that if those who compiled the Psalter at this time found things in it which did not agree with their religious thinking, they would have rejected it. They would also hesitate to add to the Psalter poetry expressing religious ideas which were unacceptable to the majority of the people.

Turning to the first part of the book, we note the term Book I, at the beginning of the forty-second Psalm, Book II, at the beginning of the seventy-third, Book III, at the beginning of the ninetyeth, Book IV, and at the beginning of the one hundred and seventh, Book V. What does this indicate? Were there older and still older collections of psalms, which after revision were retained as collections in this new Psalter? For further evidence, look at 41:13; 72:18, 19; 89:52; 106:48; and the whole of Ps. 150. You will find each of these passages a doxology, well fitted to close a book, and the one hundred and fiftieth Psalm a grand paeon of praise which could not be confined to the limits of two or three verses.

These Books were probably collections which were not broken up, but revised and put into the new Psalter intact. It is of course possible that these collections had a history similar to the whole group, each collection having been a regrouping of psalms from an older one.

Another source of suggestion as to the editorial work which has been done on the Psalter is found in the superscriptions which scholars agree were added at a late period, probably in the same spirit in which we today try to get out an



improved edition of some valuable piece of literature, introducing annotations. These editors, calling to their aid tradition and imagination, prefaced these Psalms with what seemed to them a logical superscription, which probably represents to us not historical fact, but simply what somebody chose to think about the matter a century or two before Christ. These superscriptions, therefore, should in no sense be regarded as a part of the Psalms, or as originating at the same time as the Psalms. They are however very interesting and no doubt in some cases represent traditions of long past.

Glance through the entire collection of 150 Psalms and make a tabulation of these superscriptions, noting how many of them have something to do with the musical rendition of the Psalms, the particular musician, the instrument, the meter or tune. In other cases the superscription indicates rather the occasion with which traditionally the Psalm has been associated. Other superscriptions seem to indicate that a particular Psalm belongs to an older collection, as, for instance, the collection of the sons of Korah, or a collection which was associated with the name of David, or a collection of Asaph Psalms, Psalms which are designated as prayers, or Pilgrim Psalms, doubtless associated with the pilgrimages to Jerusalem. When no superscription is given it is interesting to try to make one which will be appropriate.

The question of the authorship of individual Psalms, it will readily be seen from our hasty examination, is one which it is impossible to solve. Not one author, but many, contributed to this interesting book; not one age, but many ages.

Because of the frequency of mention of David in the superscriptions and our general conception of David as a musician, there has grown up a tradition attributing to David a considerable number of Psalms. We must remember, however, that in David's time there was no temple, and that even in the Psalms which have been attributed to him there are frequently theological ideas which were far in advance of his time. If any Psalms at all remain from the days of David, we must look for them on the basis of the internal evidence of their religious ideas, and must then allow that there are great possibilities of changes having been made by later religious enthusiasts, who might have accepted the Psalm of David as the basis of a new Psalm of their own. It is best in considering the authorship of the Psalms, therefore, to base one's conclusions wholly on the religious ideas which the Psalms contain, and to think of the author as an unknown person, so far as we are concerned, expressing his own deep religious feeling or that of a large group of the people living in this day.

This question, of whether a Psalm is a reflection of a personal religious experience or the experience of the nation, is a very interesting one, for in many Psalms, a large portion of the Psalm will seem quite clearly to reflect an individual experience, and yet before the psalmist is through he will compel you to realize that it

was the nation that he had in mind. Read Ps. 28, and note the change between vs. 7 and 8, from the individual to the national point of view. Read Ps. 31, and notice the same thing between vs. 22 and 23. In Ps. 32 the change comes between vs. 9 and 10, and Ps. 33 seems to be wholly national. This gives us a suggestion of still another basis on which we might examine the whole Psalter with very great interest.

Remembering, however, that our interest in the books of the Old Testament is not merely that of their origin, but also of their religious values for today, the thing which really concerns us most in our study of the Psalter is the religious ideas which it contains. Concerning these, first of all we find God omnipresent in the Psalter, not a philosophy about God, but the very presence of a near and just and friendly God who regards his people as his own, one who will reward the righteous and punish the wicked, one whose power is beyond that of any god, one who is the supreme God of the universe, and yet infinitely approachable by those faithful ones who call upon his name. This certainly shows us an aspect of the religious thought of the people quite different from the rapidly developing tendency to ritual and formalism.

Let us read a few of those Psalms which represent the cry of the psalmist out of anguish of heart. Whether the sorrow be personal or national it matters not. Read Pss. 22:1-21; 28:1-5; 51:1-14; 54:1-3; 57:1-6; 59:1-4. These are but examples of many Psalms which one can easily look up. Out of some great danger or bitterness of soul the psalmist cries out for the help of Jehovah. In every case, however, the Psalm does not end with this cry. Refer to each one again, and read the remainder of the Psalm, with its note of satisfaction, exaltation, or clear anticipation of a direct answer, such as will vindicate the righteousness of the suppliant, and show the justice and mercy of God. Spiritual doubts find no place in the Psalter, but a ringing note of confidence in God and the future. Even Ps. 42, a Psalm out of exile, ends with this note, and Ps. 55 springs out of a situation which seems to be utterly hopeless.

Read now a few of those Psalms which represent seasons of triumph, as 40, 46, 47, 48, 75. This is a different note from the praise Psalms that are found in the last section of the book. It is praise out of suffering which is here present. The Psalms with which the book closes (read 146-50) seem to voice congregational praise which has come to be habitual rather than that which is the result of an immediate experience.

Righteousness is a condition necessary however to the acceptance of Jehovah and the enjoyment of his blessings and favor. Read Ps. 40:1-15, to find the fate which awaits the enemies of the righteous. Read Ps. 24:1-6 as one of the beautiful examples of the reward of the righteous. Read Ps. 96 which suggests that a reign of universal righteousness is in the mind of the psalmist. Read Ps. 109, which is full of terrible exaltation over the fate of the enemies of Jehovah, and confidence that the righteous shall at last be vindicated.

Perhaps a thing that more clearly distinguishes the Psalms from other Old Testament literature is the intimate relation between God and the individual which the Psalms portray, in other words, communion with God. In Ps. 18 the note is struck in the very first verse, and continuously throughout the Psalm the writer speaks of himself as in utter harmony with God and God with him. Read Ps. 19:1-6, and note how the glories of the heavens bring about this same mood of communion with God (vs. 7-14 of this Psalm are probably another Psalm which has become attached accidentally to vs. 1-6). Ps. 27:4-8 suggests the ideal relation between the worshiper and his God. Read Ps. 8. Here again communion with God comes through musing upon nature. Read Ps. 3 and note that the writer's theme is the sustaining power of Jehovah. But note, Ps. 15, that this communion with God is conditioned upon walking uprightly and doing righteousness. Psalm 24:1-6 reminds the reader of the necessity of "clean hands and a pure heart" for him who would dwell in communion with Jehovah. In Ps. 66 this communion is not confined to an individual, but common to a group and even to the nation itself. Read Ps. 121, with its quiet confidence in the protection and ever-watchful presence of Jehovah.

But it is not alone in the joy of communion with Jehovah, apart from material results of that communion, in which the psalmist rejoices. We find him still confident that the wicked shall eventually be destroyed and the righteous shall eventually become prosperous. The way in which this hope and belief persisted, in spite of the continually increasing perils to the people of Israel, is one of the religious marvels of all times, and persists today in the Christian hope of eternal life, which was still outside the realm of Hebrew thought in the days when the Psalter was giving expression to the religious hopes of the Hebrews in their temple worship. Under that limitation triumph could come only in the fulfilment of the words of those who had taught them to believe that Judah would some day be the center of the universe, from which the law of Jehovah should go out to all the world. Read Ps. 14, and notice out of what miserable conditions the singer is, in the very last verse, assured in his own heart that Israel will yet rejoice and be glad. In Ps. 79, coming after the ruin of Jerusalem, when the nations round about are scoffing at the Hebrews and saying, "Where is their God?" the psalmist speaks

We thy people and the sheep of thy pasture  
Will give thee thanks forever:  
We will show forth thy praise to all generations.

so confident is he that Jehovah will bless his people with returning prosperity. Ps. 91 has for its climax:

With long life will I satisfy him  
And show him my salvation.

Of course there are some Psalms in the Psalter which do not strike a high note of spiritual feeling. Read Ps. 119. This is such a one, formal in thought as well as in arrangement. Each of its many divisions is designated by a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Like all poetry that conforms to a particularly formal mold, it is not inspiring. Recall, also, 19:7-14, a section in which the law of Jehovah is extolled in a formal and somewhat legalistic manner. Read Ps. 136, which very clearly bears its present form because of some musical arrangement of responses for use in ritual services. As poetry it has as little interest as many of the repetitious anthems which are given in our modern choirs. Like them, it probably depended for its effect upon the musical arrangement. Compare this with the Psalm which immediately follows it, full of the passion and yearning, the homesickness of the revengeful heart of one of those exiled Hebrews in Babylon. Bitter, indeed, must have been the memories that preserved in a book for religious worship such a Psalm as that.

Whether the order of the books has anything to do with their age, of course we cannot tell, but if the Hallelujah Psalms, of which there are a considerable number at the end, are what might be termed the new Psalms, how brilliantly they color our thought of the religious life and feeling of those dark years after the return of Israel from the captivity, when the passing of the centuries brought her no relief from oppression and no fulfilment of the glorious prophecies of her national teachers. The life of this people was ending in disaster and sorrow, in separation and bereavement, tyranny and the scorn of nations, and yet there were great souls singing their joyous praises to Jehovah, wholly in harmony with him, and living and dying confident that he was near and that they might commune with him in their hearts. Truly there is something here which makes us stand with uncovered heads before a people to whom God was certainly revealing himself more and more from generation to generation. Read the one hundred and fifty Psalms over and over again, following in your thought the myriad experiences of the nation of Israel, and as you think over the experiences of your own life you will see how for each of them there is a prayer, a plea, a psalm of exaltation, or some word which answers to the peace as well as to the turmoil which comes in the complications of life to him who has, with these writers, confidence that God is near him in loving and protecting care.

## THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

We shall follow our study of the Book of Psalms with that of a book of poetic quality, but vastly different in character—the Book of Proverbs. We have nothing in modern life that corresponds to the “wise men” of the ancient Oriental nations. These sages were a recognized group in the community, highly honored, and regularly consulted. We frequently find mention of them as at the city gates, where they freely bestowed upon the people their practical wisdom. Their

sayings were crystallizations of experience, not only their own, but the common experience of mankind. The coinage of proverbs is as natural to the Oriental mind as plain speech. King Solomon was said to have been the user, if not the author, of five thousand proverbs. See I Kings 4:29-34.

What, in the thought of the Old Testament, was the conception of the word "wisdom"? See Jer. 18:18. Did the sayings of the wise include only the proverbs of experience that any clever man might make? Read Job, ch. 28, and note that according to this writer, wisdom may not be found by searching nor purchase, but can only be attained through God—that wisdom consists in the "fear of the Lord." In other portions of the Bible you find still other significations given to the word. Read Isa. 10:13; Exod. 28:3; 31:3, 6; Deut. 34:9; Isa. 29:14; Job 39:17; Prov. 10:31; Jer. 8:9; Job 38:36; Prov. 3:19; 2:6; 8:22-31; 1:20-23; 8:14; 4:7; 15:33, 46; 5:1. Classify your results. Now read Prov. 8:22-31, noting the teaching of wisdom, her attributes, her origin, her relation to the creation and government of the universe. Is it not clear that in the mind of the ancient Hebrew wisdom was what might be termed a religious interpretation of all life, resulting in life laws and world laws which were outside the realm of religious ceremonial? They were, rather, moral attitudes, back of which was the conception of God as the creator and ruler of the universe. Utility and prudence, or, in other words, the best policy, is frequently the basis of wisdom sayings, but that is not all. The wise man or sage looked out upon life as a multitude of problems; some were small problems, others large ones. His was the task of solving them and giving to his fellow-men the benefit of his thought upon the matter.

The prophet made large use of proverbial expressions, or forms of expression. Read Amos 1:3—2:8, and note the phrase "for three transgressions, yea, for four" repeated so frequently. Amos understood how this phrase, the form of which was familiar to the people, would strike upon their ears and attract their attention. Read Ezek. 12:22; 18:2. It is a very interesting task to search through the books of the prophets and to find evidences of the influence of these wise men upon the prophet, both in his language and in his thought.

In view of all this we could hardly expect otherwise than that there would be in the sacred collection of the Hebrew literature a book which would represent exclusively the work of the wise men in the form of proverbs. As with the Psalms, these would also doubtless appear in the preservation of collections. Let us examine the book for a moment and see what we find. Read 1:1; read 10:1; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1; have we not here just what we had in the Book of Psalms, a division into sections indicating that certain earlier books or collections have been brought together in this Book of Proverbs? Chs. 1-9 seem to be a sort of introduction to the book. Read them carefully and note the impressive appeal to secure wisdom and avoid folly. But what is this wisdom which is so extolled?



Do we find the answer to this question in 1:7-29; 2:6; 3:5; 6:26, and similar statements? Is not knowledge of Jehovah and dependence upon him represented as the essence of wisdom? This gives us the keynote of the book.

The second section is the longest and most varied, chs. 10:1-22:16, a miscellaneous collection of short proverbs. It is very interesting to study the proverbs in this collection from the point of view of the various types of parallelism which we now understand. Parallelism in the Book of Proverbs, as might be expected, is very marked and more largely in this section antithetic or synonymous than synthetic. The short collection, 22:17-24:34, represents little clusters of moral homilies, somewhat more expanded than in the previous collection. These are doubtless earlier than the chs. 1-9, but it is possible that the original type of proverb appears most faithfully in the collection, chaps. 25-27. The two small collections and the poem with which the book closes suggest by their literary form an even later origin. Like the Psalter, then, we find the Proverbs a book which was the result of the work, not of any one man nor of any single group of men, but of many men through many centuries, the combined wisdom of innumerable thoughtful and observing souls among the Hebrew people.

Our interest now lies in finding just what attitude the sages had toward various groups and experiences in life. Shall we read some of the sayings concerning the nature of man? 27:19; 21:2 and 14:12, the fallibility of man's judgment compared with that of God; 27:20, his discontent; 14:10, the isolation of sorrow; 15:16, the blessing of a cheerful mind; 14:13 and 17:22, the mind and the body; 22:6 and 29:17, parent and child; 1:8, 9, the value of instruction; 15:20, the wise son; 19:14, the prudent wife; 29:21, the spoiled servant; 17:2, the wise servant. These proverbs discover to us that the wise men dealt with the common ethics of life, man in his relation to other men, the domestic circle, education, industrial life, and political life. Run through chs. 10-22, and find sayings which refer to each one of these phases of life.

How about the duty of man to himself? What constituted the good man? 20:13; 28:7; 23:29-35; the temperate man, 29:11; 16:32; 14:30; and 22:14; the value of self-restraint, chs. 5, 6, and 7; avoidance of temptation, 4:25-27; 4:14-17; the duty of meekness, 21:24; 16:18; purity of heart, 21:8 and 22:11.

What about the duty of man to others? Read 11:12; 28:8; 24:17, 18; 3:30; 29:5; 12:19; 20:19; 26:18, 19; 10:18; 22:2; 3:31, 32; 27:10; 24:10-12; 15:1; 11:17. Is there not here a practical philosophy of life, suggesting that the fundamental ethical principles underlying peaceful relationships with one's fellow-men were known and practiced by the Hebrews? It was more difficult to follow such ethical and moral programs, however, for there was as yet no knowledge of the teaching of Jesus with its motive power of love. Expediency fails in the long run. It is only love which "never faileth."

How about the rewards of human conduct? Read 11:31; 11:18; 28:10; 24:20; 4:18, 19; 10:7; 12:21; 13:25; 10:25; 10:24; 10:2; 21:18. Do not

all these proverbs proclaim that the wicked perish, the righteous prosper? It remains for others than the writers of proverbs to face the great problems of the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked.

What have the proverbs to say about God? Read 30:1-4; 15:3; 5:21; 19:21; 15:9; 3:12; 3:19, 20; 16:9; 21:31; 16:4; 18:10; 21:2; 10:3; 16:25; 11:1; 15:8; 15:25; 16:3; 35; 36. We find here no incongruity between the picture of God given us by the sages and that by the prophets. But the sages had little to do with the ceremonial side of religious life.

By careful search we may find a few references which may be interpreted as doctrinal; that is, concerning sin and sacrifice, prayer, future life, 21:4; 14:34; 29; 28:13; 15:8; 28:9; 15:29; 21:16; 14:32; 27:20.

Summing up our study of this book, do we not find that the sages were trying to do just what we attempt when we try to help people to see life religiously, and to teach them that the results of observance of the laws of life will bring happiness and success?

The alphabetical poem with which the book closes gives an ideal of womanhood which is hardly excelled today.

Pervading all the book we see the recognition of God as the ruler of the universe, and the right attitude toward him as the essential thing in life. Perhaps we shall solve our problems today on a somewhat different basis, having before us the gospel teaching of a father's love and a brotherly responsibility. But we cannot help but admire all the more the grandeur of these old sages who, lacking this later knowledge of God given us by Jesus Christ, could yet make a program of life so high in moral tone, so generous, so courteous, so conducive to the upbuilding of society, to the home life, the business life, and the political and social institutions of their time. We may do well to add their wisdom to our Christian motives.

## THE BOOK OF JOB

We now turn to a group of books through which we can see how the wise men of ancient Israel were thinking of the deeper problems of life. All through the period of the exile and in the days following the return, down to the date of the last Old Testament writing, the people of Israel were facing one great theological problem which was also a problem of life. Their old assumption that the righteous prosper and the wicked come to grief, because of the supreme justice of God, was proving itself beyond a doubt to be untenable. The righteous among Jehovah's people were suffering along with those who had been unfaithful to him—scoffers and unbelievers. Riches and prosperity were the lot of many who had forsaken him, and scorn and ignominy the portion of many who had been faithful. The old theology did not cover the case. Why did the righteous suffer?

The prophets had endeavored to explain from time to time, but their explanation was always voiced in the words of a beautiful hope of the future, a peaceful kingdom, Jehovah or his representative ruling, all nations coming to Jerusalem

for guidance and a knowledge of Jehovah. But as the centuries passed there seemed no indication of the fulfilment of these promises.

The wise man and the poet got at it differently. They said in effect, "Your idea of God is not big enough and broad enough to cover the case; you must expand your idea of God." The author of the Book of Job, writing some time during this long period, we do not know just when, has given us what many people consider the greatest epic poem of all literature. Job, a righteous man, is visited with suffering indescribable. His friends come to him with the old theory, but it does not satisfy the case. In passionate appeals, Job calls upon his God to explain why he, a righteous man, should be suffering thus. The answer comes at the end, not in the way that we expect, but in a wonderful, overwhelming sense of the justice and righteousness and omnipotence of God, before which Job bows his head in humility and reconciliation with his God.

We cannot afford to pass too hastily over this book, and we shall therefore study it somewhat in detail. Read carefully Job 1 and 2, noting that these two chapters fall into scenes, some of which take place on earth, and others in heaven, the abode of God. Divide the chapters into scenes, and imagine them passing before you, Job though deprived of property, children, and finally health, remaining a righteous man; that is, reconciled to his afflictions, so far as anything he says is concerned. Not until his three friends visit him, and sit in silence before him for seven days, does he break forth with his lament.

Turning from this prose prologue to the last chapter of the book, we find a similar prose epilogue. Read 42:7-17, and note that Job is rewarded after his suffering with more wealth, and a larger number of descendants than before his affliction, and that his friends are rebuked. There are many who consider this prose prologue and epilogue as a possible story of Job written by someone who had only the old solution for the problem of evil; the righteous will surely be rewarded in this life with prosperity and longevity.

We find in the poem, beginning with ch. 3, quite a different type of Job, not one who is quiet and meek under affliction, but one who chafes and groans, argues and bewails his fate, a much more real and attractive personality, however, than that of the prologue, which strikes one as artificial and superficial as compared with the reality of the rest of the poem.

Picture to yourself Job, unable to restrain himself longer, weakened by disease, expecting sympathy and finding it neither in family nor friends. Read his passionate outburst, 3:1-10, a curse upon the day of his birth. In 3:11-19 he pictures the peace of rest in Sheol, where he might have been if he had died at birth. Read ch. 3:1-26, and note the same wail continued. "Since death came not at birth, Oh, that death might come to me now, miserable, wretched man that I am."

One can imagine the shock to the conservative friends of Job, one of whom, the first to speak, Eliphaz, seems to represent the old prophetic point of view.

Read 4:2-11, recalling his settled theory that only the wicked are destroyed by calamity; 4:12-21 gives us a prophetic vision which he believes convincing; 5:1-7 urges the fact that Job has sinned; 8-16 advises the sufferer to seek God with hope of forgiveness, and so he continues to the end of the chapter. The difficulty with the position of Eliphaz is that it does not fit the case of Job, who, as we well remember, had not sinned. Such talk could only increase his trouble instead of diminishing it.

Now read Job's reply, 6:1-13: "My complaint is small compared with my terrible suffering, mental and physical, brought upon me by God. You do not appreciate the situation. Let me die and have rest." 6:14-30, "If I have sinned point out my sins. I declare my innocence." 7:1-21, "my case is typical of many. God is an omnipotent slave-driver, life one long pain, like a weaver's shuttle, a wind, a cloud, here one moment and forgotten the next. I have a right to complain." And so he continues begging that he be let alone, claiming that death will soon place him where Jehovah his persecutor cannot find him.

Bildad now comes on the scene. He seems to represent the sage in his form of thought, and would naturally be even more allied to tradition than the prophet. Read 8:1-22. Bildad clearly believes that Job is guilty of a great sin. But if, perchance, he should be perfect, he may rest assured that God will restore him to his former health and prosperity. Read Job's reply, 9:1-14, which is indeed, not a reply, but a continuation of his former thought: "If I contend with God I can but lose. He is too powerful for me. How can I, a man, stand before such a one as he?" Vs. 16-35, "it is hopeless; God can prove me wicked any day; the whole earth is in the hands of the Lord; I am compelled to be guilty whether I will or no; I have no chance for God is judge as well as accuser; Oh, if he would remove my suffering so that I might speak without fear, then would I plead my cause." 10:1-22, Job takes his life in his hands. He says, "I do not care to live, I am going to speak my mind. If you have a case against me, prove it. You know that I am innocent. At all events, I am the result of your own creative act. Your plan seems to have been to make me wicked whether I would or not. Oh, that I had died at birth! Leave me alone, that I may have a little comfort before I go down to Sheol."

It is now the turn of a third friend, Zophar, a man of practical religion, arrogant, superficial, wordy. He does not like to have his opinions disputed. He, too, contends that Job has sinned, and must put away the evil before God can do anything for him. "Perhaps Job does not know that he has sinned, but his suffering is a clear indication of it, and God, whose wisdom is greater, knows it."

Job responds in sarcastic vein through chs. 12, 13, 14. He says, "Wisdom, I suppose, will die with you, Zophar, but I know as much about the greatness of God as you do," and in 12:1-25, he far surpassed Zophar in his description of the greatness of God's power. He gets no satisfaction from that, 13:1-28; in



it there is no explanation of his calamity. In his despair he cries out, challenging God to meet him, and explain to him the cause of his suffering; 14:1-22 is a sorrowful wail over the wretchedness of man, his weakness, God's rigorous treatment of him, and the complete extinction of his life in death. For one moment it almost seems as if he felt the necessity of a future life where things would be righted, but again he sinks back in desperation, gloom, and darkness.

The friends have presented conceptions of God with which Job agrees, but they were not sufficient to fit his case. He is innocent; he can but challenge God, for the religious philosophy of his time did not give sufficient explanation.

We now come to a second cycle of speeches, in which again the three friends appear in turn and pronounce upon Job's case. Read Job 15:1-6, in which Eliphaz seems to imply that if Job had not been wicked before, he certainly is now, an impious creature, trying to break down the fear of God, actually charging him with injustice. "Man," says Eliphaz, "corrupt, iniquitous, cannot be pure in the sight of a God to whom angels even are impure"; in 15:17-35 he continues, "All past generations testify that the wicked man suffers throughout his life, anticipates death with fear, meets calamity and anguish. He can never prosper; he is cut off in the midst of his days, even his house perishes. He is an utter failure."

Poor Job, now, as it seems, forsaken by God, for no answer has come to his challenge, and by man as well, continues his soliloquy: 1-5, "wretched comforters ye are"; 6-11, "it matters not whether I speak or am silent, I am forsaken, given into the hands of the wicked; Jehovah has shattered me, an innocent man; my head is in the dust, darkness on my eyes."

In 16:18-17:2 Job asserts his confidence that somewhere someone must know that he is righteous, and when he is dead he will be justified, but now there is no hope. Bildad, the sage, turns upon him violently, 8:1-21, "Job, how long will you talk this way? Exhibit some common sense. We are only trying to help you, but the moral order of the universe cannot be changed for you. You are suffering the fate of the sinner." But Job argues, "Why do you reproach me? It is God who has done this thing; it is he who is my enemy; he is attacking me; I am a subject of pity, my friends, why do you continue to persecute me?" In 23-29, convinced that there is no help for him in this world, but believing that God would somehow vindicate him, he exclaims, "I believe that God will yet vindicate me and show my innocence upon earth when I am dead." So intense is his feeling that at these words he faints, but quickly revives to call down a malediction upon his friends.

It is now Zophar's turn to speak again. He has nothing new to say. He only reiterates his conviction that Job is a great sinner, and that he is suffering a just punishment. Reviewing the speeches, you will be able to observe that the first cycle of speeches had to do chiefly with God, the second cycle with the



wicked. Job does not accept the friend's theory of the wicked any more than he had accepted their theory of God, 21:2-21. He recounts the prosperity of the wicked, and 22-34 accuses his friends of trying to teach God how to judge the world. He maintains that the wicked are not punished, that frequently they live happily and die honored. The friends have generalized upon a false basis of facts. It seems as if there would be nothing further left for the friends to say.

But now we enter upon a third cycle of speeches. Eliphaz, as before, comes first. In 22:1-30, he gives the details of the great iniquity of which Job has been guilty, stripping the naked of clothing, denying food and drink to the hungry, oppressing the widow and the fatherless, doing all this because he thought God was far away and could not see. Nevertheless, he urges Job to throw away his greed, take God for his treasure, pray to him, and thus be lifted up in a new purity of heart.

But Job has reached a stage in which he does not heed the words of the friends. His mind is occupied with the painful mystery of God's power, and God's management of the universe. He longs to come before God and to plead his cause with him, and he cannot help believing that if that were possible he would be vindicated, for Jehovah must know that he is innocent. But, having no such possibility, Job falls again into further despair. In 24:1-25, he again muses upon the world-situation—the fatherless and widow robbed, the poor and needy compelled to hide themselves, outcasts, and living like beasts in the wilderness, the poor robbed by the rich, the rich growing richer, the world full of works of darkness, murderers, adulterers, robbers. Moreover, the popular view that these wicked-doers are suffering punishment is not true. They continue in power; there is on the surface an apparent lack of justice in the world, universal in scope. Indeed, such a thing as justice cannot be found.

Bildad now utters a few glittering generalities, 25:2-6. Job sarcastically suggests that the question at issue is not one of God's greatness, but his justice. Ch. 26 contains a wonderful description, again outdoing any of the friends, in its representation of the greatness and majesty of God.

According to the program, Zophar should now put in his appearance, but, if our text is not broken here, Zophar does not appear, and Job continues. This is a somewhat difficult chapter. Some scholars think that vs. 7-23 are the lost speech of Zophar, and should not be in the mouth of Job. Others contend that Job in this speech is indulging in parody, and does not mean anything that he says, but rather means the opposite. Others think that the whole chapter has been inserted by someone else than the original writer of the book.

Chapter 28 is a marvelous description of wisdom. Read it through, and ask yourself what purpose it serves in the progress of the discussion of Job and his friends. Here again, some think that this should be the end of the book, and that the chapter has been misplaced, that it is, indeed, a climax to the whole book,

of which it is undoubtedly the greatest chapter. When you have completed the reading of the book, raise the question with yourself as to whether the poem would be equally complete without the section 27:7-23, 28:1-28.

Beginning with ch. 29, Job dwells sadly upon his past, reviewing his former prosperity and those things which made him peculiarly happy. In ch. 30 he pictures in contrast the ignoble ones who now despise him; in ch. 31 he returns again to his original proposition, absolute denial of sin, no secret sins, no abuse of power given him, never selfish and indifferent to suffering. He pledges himself that these statements are accurate and challenges God to answer them, proving them different. We have now reached the end of the third cycle of speeches. What is the conclusion? Does it not seem clear that the author of the book is in sympathy with Job? The last cycle of speeches of the friends was a failure and convinced neither Job, nor the reader of the book. Here is very clearly a writer who rebels against the accepted theology of his time, and while he cannot answer the questions which he himself raises, he believes that he has a right to raise them, and that somewhere, perhaps only with God, there is an answer. His question is, Why do the righteous suffer? Note that he is fully realizing the fact that all classes of his own contemporaries disagree with him; those who represent the prophet, those who represent the wise man, those who represent the man of practical religion.

With ch. 32, a new character comes upon the scene, Elihu. Read 32:1-5. Would you think from this statement that Elihu is in sympathy with Job or with his friends? 6-14, why has he kept silent so long? Was it from policy? 32:16-22, what does he now propose to do? Note his statement in 33:1-7. Is this anything new, or is it simply reiterating what the friends have been long saying? 33:13-33 suggests that there may have been a disciplinary purpose in Job's suffering, and that his sufferings do not indicate hostility on the part of God. 34:1-20, declare that God is not unjust, that injustice in God is not conceivable. 34:21-37, it is a foolish man who objects to the favors or afflictions which God has seen best to place upon him. 35:1-16, note that Elihu continually takes up the things which Job has said, and answers them. In conclusion, vs. 9-16, "Job is a fool." 36:1-15 gives us the conclusion that affliction is for the purpose of instruction in order that men may be turned from their sins. In 16-25 Elihu turns directly to Job and tells him that his affliction has been sent to lead him to a better life. Let him beware of misinterpreting this providence of God, and again, Job is treated to a long disquisition on the greatness and power of God.

There are many who believe that the speeches of Elihu are a later addition to the original book made by someone who was not quite satisfied with the way in which the three friends had treated the case, and who had a little something to add as the reason for Job's affliction; namely, the idea of discipline.

Meanwhile, a great storm has been gathering. The dramatic action is now reaching the highest point. One feels that something must happen. It comes in

the answer of Jehovah out of the storm, in the clouds with which Job is covered up. Read 38:2-7, in which Jehovah announces himself as ready to answer the challenge of Job, but his answer is a strange one, in the form of questions. With a voice of thunder he calls upon Job to give an account of himself on the great day of creation. Was he present with Jehovah, as were the angels and the stars? Read 38:2-11, where he recounts the making of the ocean, setting it within bounds. Continue with 12-15. How about the coming of the morning and the night? and the breadth of the earth, is it within his comprehension? 38:18-38 is a very beautiful section. It consists of a rapid sketch of inanimate nature, all the phenomena of the earth, the sea, the sky, the light, the darkness, the seasons. One can hardly conceive of such an array of pictures being presented in so few words and in such wonderful form, the climax of all being an overwhelming sense of God's power, and might, and wisdom in the regulation as well as the creation of all these things. Continuing in 38:39-39:30, the poet passes to the realm of the animal world. The instinct which guides the animals—is this comprehensible to Job? It is utterly incomprehensible, and for this reason it is brought in a rapid panorama before him.

We must recall that in the days when Job is supposed to have lived, and in fact when the poet actually did live, there was no comprehension of nature scientifically. God was the immediate cause of every phenomenon. Law was recognized, and regularity; the observer knew that he could count upon certain regularly recurring events, but all was in the hands of Jehovah, and at any moment everything might be thrown into chaos.

To us, this panorama which the poet presents is extraordinarily impressive. Even our knowledge of science and of the laws of nature brings us back eventually to the first great cause, and investigation, in doing away with minor questions, but leads us to the last great mystery of all—how did it all come to be, and what is back of it?

Gathering his strength, the speaker now turns to Job and demands, in 42, Do you still desire to contest with this great God, now that you have seen afresh his power? Job humbly answers, in effect acknowledging his willingness to trust Jehovah.

But Job has accused God of unrighteousness. He must be made to recognize the justice of God. In 40:7-14 the question is raised, Will Job be willing to take God's place of responsibility as ruler of the world? Can he do better than God? Right here is inserted a very striking description of the hippopotamus, vs. 16-24, and the crocodile, 41:1-34. To appreciate what such a somewhat grotesque form of argument meant in the days of the author, we must recall the statement above concerning the lack of knowledge of science, and feel again the impression which these powerful creatures must have made upon the men of their day.

In 42:1-6, the reader is not sorry to see Job retract all that he has said against Jehovah, and to acknowledge himself willing to trust his Creator without really

understanding why he is in the situation in which he now is. 42:7-9 satisfies us by exhibiting the anger of Jehovah against the friends who were willing to accept the old theories without question, but whose acceptance of them brought them no nearer to Jehovah than Job's intelligent challenge.

We have before referred to the epilogue. It does not especially please us to learn that Job was restored to his former wealth, and that blessings which he had not had in his happier days are now given to him. With our modern experience of life, and the complexity of it, we are better pleased to leave Job alone with Jehovah, not understanding his problems, but willing to trust God for a solution of them.

Can we put ourselves for a moment in the place of those people who, living in the days of Job, confident of their innocence of any sin against Jehovah, were certain that Jehovah had not as yet answered their prayers for prosperity or given to them the satisfaction of the destruction of their enemies? What is this author trying to do but to put into literary form, the most magnificent the world has ever seen, the case of a sufferer who was innocent, whose suffering could not be explained on the old theory, and who in submission to the exigencies of life, which were beyond his control, was confident that there *was* some explanation, that he could only trust God, and be happy in communion with him? It seems needless to ask the question whether this book has a similar message to us today.

There are many who believe that the Book of Job is not intended to discuss the problem of suffering in the life of the individual, but rather, that Job himself typifies the nation of Israel, broken up, bereft of friends and land, the laughingstock of the world, yet standing faithful and reverent in the presence of the God whose ways could not be understood, but must be right.

### THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

We shall turn for just a moment to a book which may seem out of place in this connection, the little Book of Habakkuk. We will consider it here simply because it is what may be termed a "problem" book, and the problem is somewhat similar to the problem of Job; viz., how shall we understand the ways of Jehovah? The little book consists of two short chapters and a psalm. It is of mixed authorship, and cannot be definitely dated, except that in all probability this sort of question arose in the days when the Chaldeans were threatening Jerusalem. The thing that the prophet cannot understand is why Jehovah allows a wicked nation to be the means for the punishment of his own people, many of whom have been faithful to him. There is no question of the individual here; it is quite certainly the nation on whose account the prophet protests. But is not the spirit in which the prophet sums up his theory in 2:20 quite similar to the attitude of Job? "Jehovah is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." The question has not been answered, yet he is satisfied. Something of the same spirit pervades vs. 18 and 19 of the third chapter of the psalm.



## THE SONG OF SONGS

We pass now to the study of a book which is quite different from anything which we have handled. Will you for a moment recall Prov. 31, the words of King Lemuel, his injunction concerning women, wine, and oppression, with the description of an ideal wife. Recall the prevalence throughout ancient literature of stories concerning the illicit loves of gods and women, and of goddesses and men. The stories in the biblical literature of the behavior of Samson, Eli's sons, the censure of David and of Solomon, with his hundreds of wives, besides concubines, and the licentious character of the more popular form of idolatry, the worship of Baal. Consider also the place of love in life, its use and its abuse, how it enters into art and poetry; how it serves as the most powerful factor of civilization, the basis of family life and consequently of the development of the state. Would it not seem natural that some great pronouncement upon this important subject should be found in the Bible, because the Bible as a book of experience of humanity, without the experience of love, would not be complete?

There has been much controversy over this book entitled "The Song of Songs." It was only by a struggle that it was admitted to a place among the books of the Bible. Its highly sensuous imagery raised objections against its sanctity. In 90 A.D. the question of its place was settled, but in the very same council the prohibition was laid down that no Jew must read the book before the age of thirty. Apparently the songs that appear in the book were sung on occasions of joy and festivity, for in 120 A.D. a famous rabbi pronounced a solemn anathema against any who should dare to sing the songs at banquets or in wine-houses, "making it common," saying that no such a one should share in the world to come. In fact, the song had come to be interpreted as an allegory of spiritual love rather than a group of human love songs. This mystical interpretation continued down through the centuries, with increasing elaborateness. The King James Version of the Bible gives superscriptions to the chapters which illustrate this interpretation. It is significant, however, that in the New Testament the song is nowhere quoted or alluded to.

It was not until after the Reformation that the Song of Songs came to be read as a simple drama of love triumphant in marriage. The theory of the song as a drama took hold of the imagination and remained the dominant interpretation until quite recent years, and may still be found in the work of very important scholars. More recently, however, the difficulties of the dramatic theory have appeared to some to be insurmountable, and the most generally accepted explanation of the book is that it represents a collection of ancient Hebrew love songs, not all of them written by the same poet. The Oriental custom of a festive week for the marriage fête still survives, and it is possible that in this book are found the songs which were sung at these wedding feasts. One need not necessarily confine them to that, for doubtless some songs of other sorts and for



other occasions are also included. Read the book through, trying to separate these individual songs from each other and to make them stand apart.

When this is done, however, one is not quite satisfied with the result, for they have a very close relation one to the other. One turns to the dramatic interpretation at least with interest, if not conviction. A synopsis would be as follows:

Act I. 1:1—2:8, the Shulamite maiden has been induced to leave her vineyard and come to Solomon's court, temporarily in northern Palestine. Solomon desires to win her for his wife, and his plea is augmented by the persuasion of the ladies of his court.

Act II. 2:8—3:5, represents the Shulamite as describing her rustic lover and her experience in seeking him in dreams, in the great city.

Act III. 3:6—5:8, takes place in Jerusalem, where the Shulamite has been brought. King Solomon visits her, but she is impervious to his appeal, and withdraws to dream of her lover.

Act IV. 5:9—8:5, King Solomon again renews his suit. The Shulamite dances before the queen and concubines, but she retains her unflinching attachment to her country lover.

Act V. 8:5—14, she returns to her mountain home, welcomed by a chorus of shepherds and vine-dressers.

Whatever form of interpretation you may choose, however, the climax of the whole collection is found in the song of the Shulamite, 8:6, 7. In the late days of Israel's history, when the principle of purity was so dominant in all their religious life, is it not easy to see how important would be a message of this kind, directed against sensuality in all its forms? Indeed, rightly understood, the book has the same great message for today.

## ECCLESIASTES

We turn now to a book of a very different character still, another contribution of the sages. This time the problem is that of the skeptic. Let us, for a moment, imagine a young man living two or three hundred years before Christ, educated in the strict religion of the Jews. He goes forth from home, and comes in contact with the outside world in a foreign country, perhaps Alexandria. He gives up the religion of his fathers and tries every possible plan of securing happiness. He seeks pleasure; he seeks wisdom; he tries the philosophy of the Epicureans; later that of the Stoics. Nothing gives satisfaction. At last old age comes, and after spending all his life in skepticism he comes back to the religion of his fathers, and acknowledges that the only Wisdom is to *fear God*. The picture is that of an intellectual struggle, in which the man passes through various phases of skepticism, and after all finds happiness in recognition of God. In this light we will take up the study of the Book of Ecclesiastes which describes the struggle.

Read Eccles. 1:1-11, and note the utter despair in which the words are uttered. Everything is vanity. Life is not worth living. The "monotony of succession is stifling." Everything is forgotten. There is nothing new in the world; nothing that is lasting. This is the condition of the man's mind after he had been away from home for some time.

Read 1:12-2:26. There is no satisfaction in increasing one's knowledge. Search for wisdom is wearisome. Nothing is to be gained from magnificence and luxury. Perhaps sanity is to be preferred to insanity, but after all it matters not; there is not much difference for death comes alike to the wise man and the foolish. Life is hateful, and everything is "a feeding upon wind." There is nothing better than to eat and drink and to enjoy life; the ability to enjoy life is a mark of God's favor.

Read 3:1-22. If a man is sensible he will do everything in the time appointed for it, and not try to do this thing or that at a wrong time. One must not disturb himself in trying to find beauty and order in the universe; he must keep such desire within limits. The best plan is to eat and drink and enjoy good, recognizing it as the gift of God. It is true that wickedness fills the earth, and there is the same end for man as for beast. All go to the dust. After all let a man work and enjoy himself while he lives.

Read 4:1-16. Misery and wretchedness exist everywhere. The man who succeeds is only exposed to envy. Of what advantage is it to gather riches and live by one's self, deprived of all companionship? The vicissitudes of life are so many and so great that it is only a great burden and a vanity.

Read 5:1-6:12. The religion of the times is full of formalism, hypocrisy, and dreams. The government of the times is one of oppression to the tillers of the soil. Under the circumstances it is well to seek neither poverty nor riches, for even when one has gained wealth and obtained honor others come and reap the advantage. It would have been as well, perhaps, if we had not been born.

Read 7:1-29, in which the writer gives some of the things which he had been taught by his experience, explaining the value of reputation, the benefits of visiting the sick, the evil involved in impatience, the laws of prosperity and adversity. But who among the living had learned these lessons of Wisdom? Perhaps one man in a thousand, but not a single woman among all the women the writer had ever known. God made man upright, but man has "sought out many inventions."

Read 8:1-9:10, in which there is described the Wisdom needed by those who govern, but in the life of kings everything is disorder; how much better seclusion and enjoyment. The idea of a law of retribution is not in accordance with the facts. The wicked and the righteous both die, but it is a good thing perhaps to make life worth living and to throw aside everything that brings vexation.

Read 9:11-10:20. It is not the swift who reaches the goal; things go by chance. The wise man is forgotten, and money is the most powerful. The wise

men themselves are for the most part fools, and the fools occupy high places. The man who tries to reform his times generally dies in ruin and disgrace, while the empty-headed talker is supreme. One can only submit in silence to oppression and wrong.

Read 11:1—12:7. All these meditations were thoughts which had from time to time existed in the mind of the writer, but these were only temporary phases of his thought. After all, he concludes, the right thing is to do good and to help others, and whatever may be in the future this will make the present life more pleasant. One may have pleasure, but one must not go too far, for it is easy to see that evil and disaster result from a life of sensuality. In such cases death comes soon, and the spirit returns to God. If the sinner has not received punishment in this life for all his sins, judgment will be meted out in the world to come, and the trials and sufferings of this life will, in the future world, prove to have been the beginning of an education which shall ultimately lead to success.

Read 12:8—14. Some writer adds the true interpretation of the book. We are told that it was written by a man who, though engaged in a struggle, was after all seeking for wisdom. The wanderings through which he passed are hard to follow, but the sum and substance of it is that the wisest thing for a man is to "fear God and keep his commandments."

It is interesting to note that there are other sacred books which are still recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, but which the Protestant Church calls Apocryphal books. There is a great deal of similarity between these books and the Book of Ecclesiastes which has held its place in our Bible among the biblical books.

### THE BOOK OF DANIEL

We now come to the examination of the very last book, a book which has been popularly classed among the prophets, the Book of Daniel. Let us take note at once, however, that in the Hebrew Bible the Book of Daniel is classed among the Writings; that is, in the same collection with those purposeful books which we have but recently been examining. Read ch. 11 of this book, and note the historical allusion, apparently to four great empires. These have been interpreted as the Babylonian, the Medean, the Persian, and the Greek, the writer of the book living in the latest of these periods. But to him, as God has ruled history in the past, so will he rule in the future, and the description of these great kingdoms, in the last of which he is living, is but an introduction to ch. 12, in which the Kingdom of God stands forth, a time when victory shall come to everyone whose name shall be found written in the book of life, whether dead at the present time or living.

Turning back to ch. 7, we find there also four kingdoms represented by four beasts, and going still farther back to ch. 2, four kingdoms symbolized by the colossal image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. These are all great interpretations

of the writer of the history of his own and earlier times. The date of the book is probably some time in the century just preceding the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, 164 B.C., and this man is the evil genius of the book, although never mentioned by name. These were days in which the Jews were suffering cruel oppression. Under the veil of visions many times fantastic in form, but well understood by those for whose comfort they were intended, the writers of these times strove to keep up the courage of their people, and to point steadily to the time when the fulfilment of the promises of God should come.

It was but a century and a half before the birth of Christ, a manifestation of God to the world, far different from that which the Jews had anticipated. Their great hopes of the revival of their kingdom was destined to be disappointed, but who shall say that they have not been fulfilled, since out of the Jewish people came one who is leading the world to God, and is slowly, very gradually, but surely, establishing the Kingdom of God upon earth.



To what conclusions have we now come in our study of the Old Testament? Each of us will doubtless have his own point of view and certain impressions which he has received, which may not be common to us all. But can we agree upon a few principles, somewhat as follows?

1. Literature which lives through the centuries is an expression of worthwhile life.
2. To fully appreciate such literature, we must know something of the national or individual life from which it sprang.
3. Much of the beauty and inspiring power of the literature of the Old Testament is due to the sense of its saturation with the growing conceptions of God.
4. The Hebrew people were, in the divine providence, selected for the special instrument through which a revelation of God could be given to the world because of special characteristics which they possessed, and their social and religious development was closely linked with their political history.
5. *Our* religious thought comes to us through a long heritage of suffering and struggle, both national and individual.
6. God is in history; mankind has a destiny. That destiny is being achieved through both nations and individuals.
7. The choice of nations for the revelation of God did not cease with the Hebrews.
8. The choice of individuals for the purposes of God did not end with the prophets or Jesus, and Paul.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe the growth of the Psalter.
2. What can you say concerning the authorship of the Psalms?
3. Describe Hebrew parallelism.
4. What significance have the superscriptions?
5. What period of Hebrew thought do the Psalms chiefly reflect and why?
6. What are some of the religious ideas of the Psalter which are as helpful to Christian thinking today as they were to the Hebrews?
7. How does the attitude of the Psalms toward God differ from the conception of him presented by the law of Leviticus?
8. How does the psalmist regard nature?
9. Would you say that the religious attitude of the Psalms was pessimistic or optimistic?
10. Name psalms which might be classed under each of the following heads: Nature, Prayer, A Cry Out of Suffering, Communion, History, Victory, Ritual, Praise, Benediction.
11. Describe the growth of the Book of Proverbs.
12. What was the place of the wise man in Israel's life?
13. Name famous collections contained in the Book of Proverbs.
14. Name some indications of standards of morality enjoined in the Proverbs.
15. What would you consider the motive for right living as reflected in Proverbs?
16. What is the attitude of the writers of Proverbs toward God?
17. What toward education, wealth, industry, temperate living?
18. Would you say that the Proverbs were inspiring?
19. What is the Book of Job?
20. What is the problem of life which it presents? How might this problem be related to the nation?
21. Give the general structure of the book.
22. What theory of suffering do the three friends represent?
23. How do they regard God?
24. What has observation of life taught the writer of the book, speaking through Job, in regard to the lot of the righteous and the wicked?
25. How does Job regard God previous to the speeches of Jehovah? What change takes place after these speeches in his attitude toward God?
26. What do you consider the finest passages in the book?
27. Is the solution at which the book arrives satisfactory to us today? If not, why not?
28. How is the Book of Habakkuk related to the problem books?
29. What are the characteristics of the Song of Songs?
30. What artificial interpretation of the Song of Songs was for a long time current, and how did it arise?



31. Which of the modern interpretations do you prefer?
32. In what section is the climax of the book?
33. What is the problem of the Book of Ecclesiastes?
34. To what conclusions does the author bring us?
35. What is the place of the Book of Daniel chronologically and historically in relation to other books of the Bible?
36. For what reason do you think that the books of the Bible have gained their place in the sacred collection?
37. Apart from the message of each book, what to you are some of the messages of the Old Testament as a whole?
38. In what way do you think that the study of the Old Testament prepares us for the study of the New Testament?
39. What have you personally gained from this course?
40. How will it help you in teaching any portion of the Bible?

## SUGGESTIONS TO LEADERS OF CLASSES

### STUDY I

In carrying on a club or class there are certain conditions which make the work interesting. A leader who grasps the subject is important. Active participation by members of the group is equally valuable. Such participation leads to the development of the individual and gives a sense of combined effort. The leader should give a good start at the beginning of the hour and should be able to close the period with a careful summing up of results. The time between may well be occupied by members in giving special reports, readings, stories, reproduction of dialogue or more complete dramatization. The contributions of art may also be shown through small prints or larger pictures. The Tissot pictures present the largest number of Old Testament subjects.

Some special topics which might be assigned on the Book of Samuel are:

1. The literary characteristics of the Book of Samuel.
2. A comparative map study of the kingdoms of Saul and David.
3. Social conditions in Israel in the days of Saul and David.
4. Some then current ideas about God.
5. The work of the prophet in that early time.
6. David's political contributions to Israel's history.
7. Crises in which David rose above the moral standards of his day.

Special activities may be the dramatization of the story of David and Abigail or topics for discussion such as:

1. What can Christianity do for a man like Saul?
2. When and how would David have acted differently had he had the light of Christianity?
3. How would a Christian act today if he were as great as David: (a) in politics, (b) in religion, (c) in courts of law, (d) in social circles?
4. David was a musician and a poet. What should be a man's attitude toward the fine arts?

If preferred, meetings can be devoted entirely to the telling of stories or to a series of dramatizations. The above suggestions are ample for two fortnightly or four weekly meetings.

### STUDY II

The following topics will make good studies if it seems desirable to have individual reports given:

1. Political changes in Northern Israel from the time of David to that of Ahab.

2. Social ideals in Israel in the time of Elijah, as illustrated by the Naboth story.
3. Elijah's problem religiously considered.
4. Ahab's problem politically considered.
5. The Prophets as life-savers through literature in the ninth century B.C.
6. Psychological Studies: (a) Abraham, the *father*; (b) Jacob, the *business man*; (c) Joseph, the *man of ideas*; (d) Moses, the *man who communes with God*.
7. A Comparison of the Oratorio of Elijah with the Biblical story.

Interesting discussions may be suggested as follows:

1. Was Ahab a good king?
2. Suppose the fire had not descended, would Elijah have lost faith in Jehovah?
3. What are the qualities that make great leaders?
4. Does the judgment of men need the inspiration of God in the task of religiously interpreting history and political affairs? In other words could the prophets have done what they did without the inspiration of God?
5. Can we expect God to inspire men who are honestly seeking for the solution of problems of social justice or of international peace and good-will today?

One of the best ways in which to carry on a club is to have the members discuss and answer the questions given at the end of each study. They may also test the religious teachings with which each study closes.

It may interest the members of the group to know that the Oratorio of Elijah has within the last year been presented in dramatic form. The work, however, is stupendous and depends for success upon a very large chorus, soloists of unusual dramatic ability, as well as good voices. It should not be undertaken except under the most favorable circumstances and the finest leadership.

Very interesting brief dramatizations from the lives of the patriarchs can be made. *Joseph and His Brethren* is the name of a play which was magnificently staged in New York some years ago and which held the attention of thousands for a succession of weeks. This story, however, can be very simply presented in dramatic form with good effect.

### STUDY III

Individual reports may well be made from summaries of the evidence of the Book of Judges upon:

1. The social ideals of the Hebrews in the times of the Judges.
2. The customs of the Hebrews of these times relating to places of worship.
3. The prayers of the heroes of the Book of Judges.
4. The Conquest of Canaan, as pictured in this book.
5. The fable of Jotham used as a religious lesson for children.

Most profitable discussions might be upon questions 16, 18, and 19 of the review questions.

The story of Jephthah furnishes the best material for dramatization, or for a simple dialogue.

An inspiring reading or recitation from the Song of Deborah is very effective in giving the feeling of the times of the Judges. Since a large portion of the Old Testament is in poetic form in the Hebrew, it is well to emphasize those points at which the poetic form appears in the English translation.

#### STUDY IV

At this point in our study we take up books through which we are able to see how essential to the understanding of the men of the Bible is a knowledge of the history and conditions of the times in which they lived. The leader of the group will find it profitable at this time to carefully define to his class what is meant by the historical method of study. In the case of the Hebrews especially a knowledge of the geography of the country at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea is of very great importance. A good wall map of the ancient world should be before the class continuously.

Special topics to be considered concerning Amos may be such as:

1. The reign of Jeroboam in Israel, considered (a) politically, (b) socially, (c) religiously, (d) conditions of labor and capital in city and country life.
2. Amos, the farmer and public-spirited citizen—his personal life, his ideals of God.
3. The ideals of Amos regarding wealth and its uses.
4. Compare Amos' arraignment with what might be said of a modern city.
5. The favors enjoyed by the modern city, which Israel did not have, and the bearing of the statement of Amos that the blame of Israel was greater because her privilege had been greater.
6. The history of idolatry in Israel before Amos, the high places, sacred places. The great religious sanctuaries of northern Israel in the days of Amos—their location, celebrations, and customs.
7. Let each member contribute the passage from Amos which has impressed him most.

Topics for discussion may be:

1. Is it greater to be mechanically inspired to predict, or to see with the vision of a man of God who knows what will result because he perceives, as others do not, the eternal laws of God, and has the courage to speak according to this vision?
2. What qualifications are necessary for the modern prophet? Do they differ from those required in the prophet of Israel? If so, in what way?
3. Why have we not made more progress toward social justice since the days of Amos, 750 B.C.?

4. Is the spirit of formality in religion as prevalent today as in the days of Amos?

5. Similarities and differences between Amos' preaching and coming disaster and modern preaching of the doctrine of future punishment.

Turning to Hosea we may suggest:

1. Hebrew ideals of family life as evidenced in laws and customs.

2. Peculiarities of Hosea's personal temperament as shown by his book.

3. Influences in the community which led to the domestic tragedy of Hosea's life.

4. The message which Hosea might have given to Israel had he thought of God as Amos thought of him. (Take any chapter of the book and alter it.)

5. The importance of the character of men in places of leadership in the community or the nation, in business, politics, religion.

Discussion may be conducted upon:

1. How far is every member of the community responsible when one member fails?

2. Since the pleas of Amos and Hosea were so opposite in tone, why did not one of them succeed in persuading the people to reform?

3. To what extent has an intelligent Christian citizen, with ability as a leader, a right to refuse opportunities for such leadership?

## STUDY V

No group should be allowed to leave the study of the Books of Isaiah and Micah without being deeply impressed by the beauty, the majesty, and the oratorical power of the speeches of these prophets. Topics which would help to emphasize this feature are:

1. The influence of Isaiah's poetic imagination upon his speeches.

2. The call of Isaiah.

3. The paraphrase of the sermon of which the song of the vineyard is the text.

4. Characteristics of the age of peace which Isaiah describes.

5. The passage from Isaiah, chapters 1-39 which I like best—a contribution from several members.

6. The same from Micah.

No prophet more vividly portrays in his own speeches the conditions of the times than does Isaiah. Some members of the class should therefore report on:

1. Sins of Judah as depicted in Isaiah's preaching, 2:1-4:6.

2. The same through a paraphrase of 7:10-23 and 8:1-8, and chapter 1.

Topics relating to the political situation may be:

1. The relations of Syria, Northern Israel, Assyria, and Judah in the early days of Isaiah.



2. Political conditions in the days of Hezekiah.
3. A comparative study of the policies of Ahaz and Hezekiah, and their attitude toward the prophet of Jehovah.
4. The Egyptian party in Judah.
5. The fate of Samaria.

Interesting topics for discussion might be:

1. Are men called today? If so, how is one to know when and for what he is called?
2. Does God use the calamities of the world to bring about good? Has anything good resulted from the recent world-war?
3. Modern preachers of social righteousness—their task, their ideals, and the results of their work.
4. Jerusalem was finally destroyed. Does this fact lessen the value of Isaiah's message?

5. The relation of peace to the ethical and religious qualities of a nation.

Suggestions have frequently been made with regard to the dramatic possibilities of these prophetic writings. The Book of Isaiah is particularly rich in scenes in tableau form, selected orations which might be recited in characteristic costume, or short dialogues.

## STUDY VI

In conducting the work of a group studying the Book of Jeremiah, it is particularly important that the leader should see that a clear view is secured of the background of history. The changes are so rapid, the conditions so confused, and the crises so acute, that most people have a very vague and cloudy notion of everything except the final carrying away of the people into captivity at the fall of Jerusalem. Of course the matter of greatest importance is that the character of Jeremiah shall stand out in its supreme self-sacrifice and adherence to the self-imposed task of preaching righteousness to a people, on the one hand confused and terrified by the encroachments of the enemy, and on the other blindly confident that the former deliverances of the people would be repeated in the present crisis. To trace analogies between the life of Jeremiah and many modern reformers is also very important. This book possesses wonderful possibilities for dramatic presentation in tableaux, brief scenes, or a continuous series of scenes.

Topics for reports:

1. The "calls" of the prophets. What did they signify? What was their source? What relation had they to the times in which the prophets lived? The "call" of Jeremiah.
2. Religious ideals concerning worship and conduct in the reigns of Amon and Manasseh.
3. "The Scythian terror," in fact and in the descriptions of Jeremiah.
4. Jeremiah's early training and experience.

5. A comparison of Isaiah's interpretation of the Assyrian invasion and Jeremiah's interpretation of the Scythian invasion, and of the outcome in the case of each.

6. The finding of the law book.

7. Contents and doctrine of the law book.

8. The reformation of Josiah.

9. Death of Josiah, and interpretation by Judah.

10. A sketch of political changes in Babylon after the death of Josiah.

11. Jeremiah's "roll" and its fate.

12. His symbolic sermons, as "The Potter," "The Rechabites," etc.

13. Jeremiah's theory of the future of Judah and the relation of the Jews to Jehovah.

14. The personal misfortunes of Jeremiah in the closing years of Jerusalem's decline and fall.

15. The story of Jeremiah's loyalty to deserted Judah, and his probable fate.

Discussion:

1. Are modern preachers "called" to a mission in any respect similar to that of Jeremiah? What is it?

2. What elements are necessary in order that a reformation may be lasting.

3. If you had been a Jew living in Judah in Jeremiah's time, how would you have regarded him, and why?

4. What do you think was Jeremiah's greatest contribution to the religion of the Hebrews?

## STUDY VII

It will be necessary for the leader to take great pains to give to the class a clear idea of the historical movements of this period. We have but lately in our study witnessed the rise of Babylon to power, and now we are in the midst of Babylon's decline, and the coming of the Persian conqueror Cyrus the Great. A clear understanding of all this will give the reality which it is desirable to secure in connection with the study of the events of these times. Maps, charts, encyclopedias, histories, which can contribute information should all be available.

Special subjects for reports may be:

1. The religious and social life of ancient Babylon.

2. The Jewish colony in Babylon, its constituency, its hopes, its interpretation of the captivity under the ministry of Ezekiel before the fall of Jerusalem.

3. The imagination of Ezekiel and the way in which it served him in his work.

4. The probable mental and spiritual effect upon the Jewish colony, of the fall of Jerusalem and the coming of new captives to Babylon.

5. Ezekiel's messages of comfort.

6. Ezekiel's New Jerusalem.
7. Cyrus the Great, his character and conquests.
8. Isaiah's arraignment of idols and idolatry, with selected readings.
9. The immediate purpose of Isaiah of Babylon.
10. Some word pictures from Isaiah 40-56, concerning God the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, the journey home, the future glory of Jerusalem.
11. Isaiah's doctrine of the mission of the Hebrew people.

Topics for discussion may be:

1. How did Ezekiel's idea of responsibility for sin differ from the ideas of earlier prophets? In what way would you say that it differed from our idea of responsibility for sin today?
2. How does our idea of God differ from that of the second Isaiah, and from what sources did these additions come?
3. The two prophets, Ezekiel and second Isaiah, were idealists in their attitude toward the future. To what extent may we profitably indulge in such idealization of the future?
4. How much of the effect of the prophet's work was due to the literary beauty of his messages? To what degree is any idea more impressive when expressed in a beautiful form? Illustrations may be given.

## STUDY VIII

The following topics may be assigned for special reports:

1. The Political Status of Judah in the Return, and the nations which were related to it.
2. The Jerusalem which the returning Jews found.
3. The new Temple, and the problem of its building.
4. The message of Haggai.
5. The visions of Zechariah (given in direct discourse by several members of the group).
6. Ezra's expedition and reform.
7. The new Law Book.
8. Nehemiah as governor and reformer.
9. The Book of Ruth and its possible relation to this period. (Dramatization if preferred.)
10. The story of the Book of Esther. (Well told.)
11. The message of Joel.
12. The message of Jonah.

Subjects for discussion:

1. Were the Jews who stayed in Babylon, or the ones who returned, most to be envied at this time?

2. Was Ezra or were the people right in regard to the mixed marriages?
3. Jonah preached of a God who cared for all nations. What did Jesus add to this?

A very interesting thing to do at this point is to present a pageant of the prophets, taking Sargeant's frieze as a suggestion, and letting each person represent a prophet, giving a quoted typical brief message, which has also an application to our present-day problems, social or religious.

## STUDY IX

NOTE.—At least three meetings should be given to the consideration of these topics, four would be better. Reports on the following may be given:

1. The hymnbook of the Hebrew people.
2. Reading of typical psalms—nature, historical, prayer, thanksgiving, praise, imprecation.
3. The origin of national songs, and an attempt to relate one psalm to a historical occasion.
4. Psalms in other portions of the Bible.
5. The collections of "sayings" of the Hebrew people, their origin and transmission.
6. Themes of these sayings and striking examples from each.
7. The problems of Job—national and individual.
8. The theory of the three friends regarding suffering.
9. Job's attitude toward them and toward God.
10. The speeches of Jehovah and their effect upon Job.
11. The literary beauty of the book.
12. Other problem books, what they treat, and with what results.

*Discussion:* The following subjects may be discussed with profit:

1. Is there any essential difference between the proverbs of the Hebrews as preserved in the Bible and our own modern proverbs? If so, what is it?
2. Was Job's problem solved? How do we solve the problem of the suffering of the righteous today? Is it a better solution than that given in the Book of Job?
3. As society becomes more complex with advancing civilization, do the problems of life multiply or disappear?
4. Does the study of the Old Testament help us in any way to face the problems of life? If so, how?
5. What is the use of studying the Old Testament when we have a fuller revelation of God in the New Testament?







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